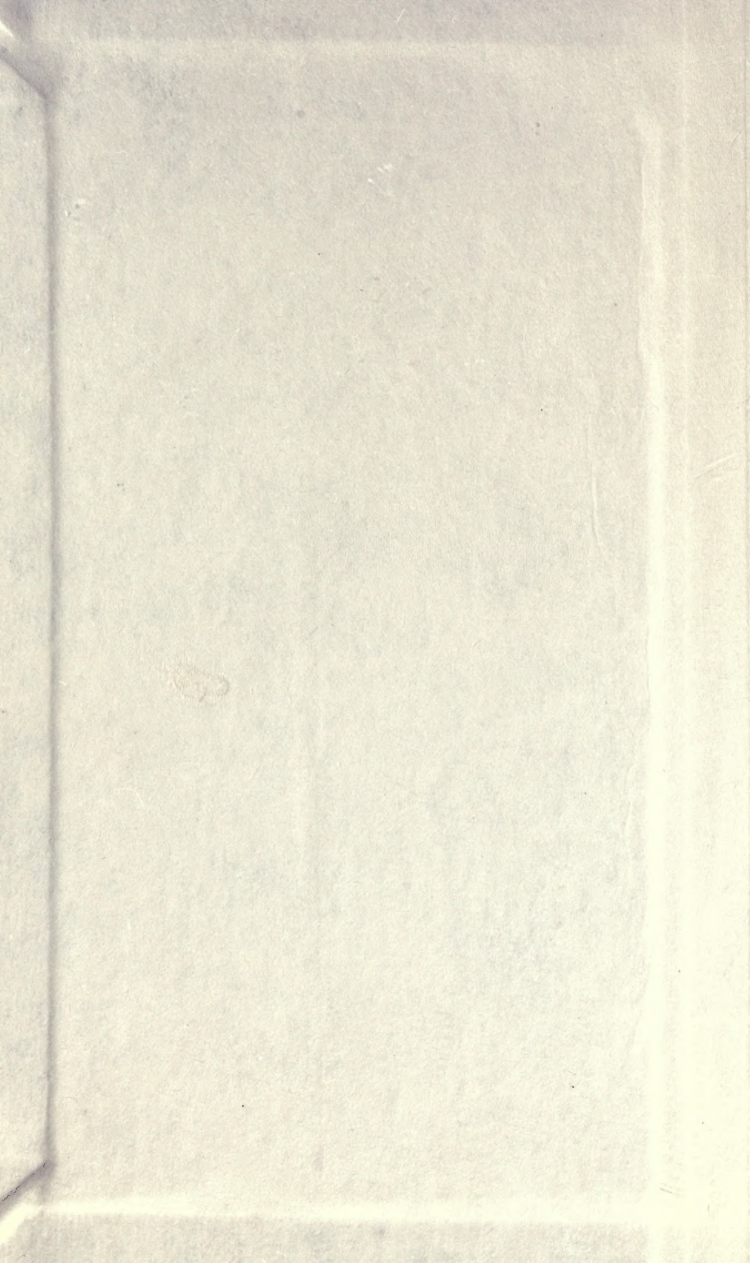


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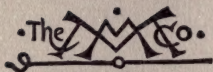








THE HOUND OF HEAVEN  
AN INTERPRETATION



THE MACMILLAN COMPANY

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LONDON · BOMBAY · CALCUTTA  
MELBOURNE

THE MACMILLAN CO. OF CANADA, LTD.  
TORONTO



# THE HOUND OF HEAVEN

AN INTERPRETATION

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New York

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1922

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**Set up and electrotyped. Published June, 1921.**

**Printed in the United States of America**



TO  
THE HOUND OF HEAVEN  
THAT HIS PURSUIT OF OUR SOULS  
MAY BE SWIFT AND BRIEF



## PREFACE

**T**HIS little volume is offered as an ascetical and scriptural interpretation of the poem. The author refrains almost entirely from literary questions. His one aim has been to attempt to clarify obscure passages and to give all passages the atmosphere that is required for them from Sacred Scripture and from standard ascetical principles, for he feels that these not only bring added light and pleasure to the understanding of the poem, so instinct with invigorating thought, but that they are necessarily demanded for even a superficial attainment of Thompson's thought. The whole poem is vibrant with spirituality; and anyone who misses this, is thereby hopelessly out of harmony with the whole theme.

The author wishes to caution the reader that he has no intention of asserting that Thompson had such or such definite passages of Scripture in view. Such passages are offered as illuminative of the poem, not necessarily as sources.

Lastly the author wishes to express his indebtedness to his many Jesuit brethren who have so unselfishly aided him by encouragement, coöperation, and constructive advice in this work.

FRANCIS P. LEBUFFE, S. J.

Fordham University,

Feast of SS. Simon and Jude, 1920.





**THE HOUND OF HEAVEN**  
**AN INTERPRETATION**





## INTRODUCTORY ESSAY

**T**O all who read the history of mankind with unsoiled eyes the one outstanding and out-distancing fact is the insistent love of God. This love was first shown in the building of this world-home for man, so beautiful and so plural in its appeal to every sense of its rational lord. Man was to enjoy it without labor, reaping where he had not sown. This was God's first manifestation of love, yet man's truancy came speedily. Adam and Eve threw away God's love for them that they might hearken to a false promise of a share in self-sufficing knowledge. Forsaken and spurned by them, God would not have it so. Man, as any other foolish, petulant child, must be saved from his own folly. Man would make away from God, and God determined to pursue man and bring him back. This pursuit of the human race by God is described by St. John Chrysostom (Homily 5 on the Epistle to the Hebrews ii, 14-16):

“Paul wishing to show the great kindness of God towards man, and the Love which He had for the human race, after saying: ‘Forasmuch then as the children were partakers of blood and flesh, He also Himself likewise took part of the same’ (ii, 14), follows up the subject in this passage. For do not regard

lightly what is spoken, nor think this merely a slight matter, His taking on Him our flesh. He granted not this to Angels; 'For verily He taketh not hold of Angels, but of the seed of Abraham.' What is it that he saith? He took not on Him an Angel's nature, but man's. But what is 'He taketh hold of'? He did not (he means) grasp that nature, which belongs to Angels, but ours. But why did he not say, 'He took on Him,' but used this expression, 'He taketh hold of'? It is derived from the figure of persons pursuing those who turn away from them, and doing everything to overtake them as they flee, and to take hold of them as they are bounding away. For when human nature was fleeing from Him, and fleeing far away (for we 'were far off'—Ephesians ii, 13), He pursued after and overtook us. He showed that He has done this only out of kindness and love and tender care."

This pursuit was long, and man had found his way down to the utter depths of the most degrading paganism, and seemed almost successful in his flight from God. This, St. Paul places before our eyes in words that picture with unrivalled force those godless men: "So that they are inexcusable, because that, when they knew God, they have not glorified Him as God, or given thanks, but became vain in their thoughts and their foolish heart was darkened. For professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, and they changed the glory of the incorruptible God

into the likeness of the image of a corruptible man, and of birds, and of fourfooted beasts, and of creeping things. Wherefore God gave them up to the desires of their heart, unto uncleanness to dishonor their own bodies among themselves, who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever, Amen. For this cause God delivered them up to shameful affections . . . and as they liked not to have God in their knowledge, God delivered them to a reprobate sense, to do those things which are not convenient" (Rom. i, 20-28). It was, then, when man had all but become a beast, "when the fulness of the time was come, God sent His Son, made of a woman, made under the law, that He might redeem them who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons" (Galatians iv, 4-5), "and the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us . . . and of His fulness we all have received and grace for grace" (St. John i, 14, 16). Hope was relighted in the human heart and out of the sodden ashes of paganism arose the serried ranks of martyrs and virgins and holy witnesses to the love and kindness of God to fallen, fleeing man.

This racial pursuit of God is again, in a very special way, manifested in the history of the Jews, the chosen people of God under the older dispensation. Having selected them from out the nations of the world at the time He called Abraham from Ur of the Chaldeans,



God further showed His loving care, for it was He "who smote Egypt with their first born . . . who brought out Israel from among them . . . with a mighty hand and with a stretched out arm . . . and slew strong kings . . . and He gave their land for an inheritance" (Psalm cxxxv, 10-21). But the people would not have God alone for "they made also a calf in Horeb and they adored the graven thing" (Psalm cv, 19). Yet not for that did God abandon Israel to his witlessness. "As an eagle enticing her young to fly, and hovering over them, He spread His wings, and hath taken him and carried him on His shoulders. The Lord alone was his leader and there was no strange god with him. He set him upon high land that he might eat the fruits of the fields, that he might suck honey out of the rock and oil out of the hardest stone, butter of the herd and milk of the sheep with the fat of the lambs, and of the rams of the breed of Basan, and goats with the marrow<sup>a</sup> of wheat, and might drink the purest blood of the grape" (Deuteronomy xxxii, 11-14). Surely Israel was a petted child yet with wonted petulancy, he balked his Father's plans for "the beloved grew fat and kicked: he grew fat and thick and gross, he forsook God who made him and departed from God his Saviour. They provoked Him by strange gods and stirred Him up to anger with their abominations" (Deuteronomy xxxii, 15-16). This, too, was their continued way of waywardness until the words of aging Josue came true:

"But if you will embrace the errors of these nations that dwell among you and make marriages with them and join friendships; know ye for a certainty that the Lord your God will not destroy them before your face, but they shall be a pit and a snare in your way, and a stumbling-block at your side, and stakes in your eyes, till He take you away and destroy you from off this excellent land, which He hath given you" (Josue xxiii, 12-13). The day did come, when the exiled Jews sobbed out in their sorrow (Psalm cxxxvi, 1-4):

"Upon the rivers of Babylon, there we sat and wept,  
When we remembered Sion.  
On the willows in the midst thereof  
We hung up our instruments;  
For there they that led us into captivity, required of us  
The words of songs;  
And they that carried us away, said:  
'Sing ye to us a hymn of the songs of Sion.'  
How shall we sing the song of the Lord  
In a land that is strange?"

Again and again they were won back to God's friendship but again and yet again went aside after other loves and the whole history of that strange, stiff-necked folk is one of the persistency of God's love, which would not brook refusal. Not even when the Master of the vineyard sent His only Son to them, would they give Him their undivided hearts, for that same Son was forced to cry (St. Matthew xxiii, 37): "Jerusalem,

Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets and stonest them that are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered together thy children as the hen doth gather her chickens under her wings, and thou wouldst not!" But despite it all, on Good Friday morning they renounced their allegiance to God, who for generations had been their king; for, hurling back Pilate's taunt, the chief priests answered: "We have no king but Cæsar" (St. John xix, 15). After this rejection would God continue the pursuit? Did infinite Goodness find yet more patience with this ungrateful child? Yes, even after they had murdered their Messiah, "the Hope of Israel," "The Desire of the everlasting hills," for twelve long years the Apostles labored unitedly in Jerusalem to win this faithless folk back to God. Nor did the pursuit end there; for we know that God's love will pursue them until the great day of reckoning, before which the "remnant of the house of Israel" is to be saved.

This pursuit of the whole mankind and of the Jewish folk in particular is but a larger manifestation of God's way with each individual soul. "Man is created to praise, reverence and serve God our Lord, and by this means to save his soul; and the other things on the face of the earth were created for man's sake, and in order to aid him in the prosecution of the end for which he was created" (Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius). Hence the command: "Hear, O Israel, the Lord, our God, is one Lord. Thou shalt



love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart, and with thy whole soul, and with thy whole strength" (Deuteronomy vi, 4-5), for "I am the Lord thy God. . . . Thou shalt not have strange gods before Me. . . . Thou shalt not adore them, nor serve them: I am the Lord thy God, mighty, jealous (Exodus xx, 2-5). But each soul is wont to be rebellious and deems it hard to find in God its all of love and in subjection to Him its highest freedom. "A vain man is lifted up into pride and thinketh himself born free like a wild ass's colt" (Job xi, 12). Mostly our rebellion is but the ignorant querulousness of a peevish child, simply a blind groping of the human heart among created things after that "unlimited good" which alone will satisfy it adequately. Sometimes, however, there is a deal of conviction within us that it is hard for us to kick against the goad, for we realize, to our own increasing discomfiture, that by not yielding we are hurting our own real good. Rarely is our rebellion an open rejection of God's authority. Yet there are men that are such rebels, and of each of them it can truly be said: "His pride and his arrogancy and his indignation is more than his strength" (Isaias xvi, 6), for this is the kind of pride which ultimately refuses to be conquered by God and leads direct to eternal wreckage of all that is truly noble in man.

It is this endeavor of the soul to make away from God and God's pursuit that forms the theme of this poem. Whether this poem is autobiographical or not,

seems largely a superfluous academic question. Undoubtedly it is, at least in broad outlines, but it seems to add little inward worth to the interpretation to know that this line tallies with a certain incident in Thompson's life and that line with another. This "specialist" treatment makes little for the general appeal. What is of interest and what secures the widest appeal for the poem is that it is autobiographical of "a" soul, in aspects common to it and all mankind, and therefore autobiographical of *every* soul, for it is regrettably true that every soul of every child of Adam, with the single and signal exception of Mary, the Mother of God, has fought with varying intensity this fight against its "Tremendous Lover." We have all "fled Him, down the nights and down the days" and the poem smites on our souls as did the handwriting on Balthasar's wall. As we read and ponder, there resound within our hearts the accusing words of the prophet Nathan to King David: "Thou art the man." Whether anthologists refuse to class this poem as a "great poem" or not, it is more widely read and will be more widely read than many that measure up to an arbitrary yardstick. Against its poignant throbbings we lay our own hearts "to beat and share commingling heat"; and it is quite safe to say that many a prayer has been breathed and many a heart moved to take at least initial steps to end its flight from God, as line after line awakened memories that burned and seared the soul unto its own healing.

Like the Psalms of David, though inevitably with far less authority and consequent appeal, it reads each human heart for its own self and makes plain to it the meaning of those ceaseless cravings which, if misconstrued, torture our hearts as they pilgrimage to Father's home. Thompson would tell us that all yearnings of the soul can be met by God alone and that it is the sheerest folly to try to ease that fundamental search for love, coextensive with our being, save in the way that God will have it. God wants our love; and God will have it, and have it in the way He Himself desires—or else the soul-hunger will never be eased. With some this pursuit of God is swift and decisive; and so a Magdalene becomes at once a woman of saintliest ways, a Saul stands forth as the world-grasping Paul, to whom “to live is Christ, and to die is gain” (Philippians i, 21), a Spanish cavalier is hurled by a cannon-ball into the saintliness of Ignatius. With others God's task is harder, the pursuit is longer and it is only when God has time and time again bruised their hearts and torn their souls wide asunder and plucked thereout each object that was loved, that they yield to Him and in that yielding find surcease of pain and plenitude of sanctifying love and that peace which the world cannot give and is equally impotent to take away, “the peace of God, which surpasseth all understanding” (Philippians iv, 7).

Thompson is not alone in his endeavor to show the futility of trying to escape from God. Holy

Scripture, with all the force of God's own authority, frequently insists on this thought. The whole idea is summed up strikingly in our Lord's simple metaphor of the Good Shepherd: "I am the Good Shepherd. The good shepherd giveth his life for his sheep" (St. John x, 11), for "if he shall lose one of them, doth he not leave the ninety-nine in the desert and go after that which was lost, until he find it?" (St. Luke xv, 4). Elsewhere in Holy Scripture we find similar thoughts. The Royal Psalmist (Psalm cxxxviii, 7-12) speaks from the side of God's *omnipresence* and His *conserving* love, while Thompson presents God's pursuit after a fleeing, erring soul that He wills to *bring back* to His love. The Psalmist view is one of repose, Thompson's one of intensest activity:

"Whither shall I go from Thy spirit?

Or whither shall I flee from Thy face?

If I ascend into heaven, Thou art there;

If I descend into hell, Thou art present.

If I take my wings early in the morning

And dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea,

Even there also shall Thy hand lead me

And Thy right hand shall hold me.

And I said: Perhaps darkness shall cover me,

And night shall be my light in my pleasures.

But darkness shall not be dark to Thee,

And night shall be light as the day;

The darkness thereof, and the light thereof are alike to  
Thee."



Again holy Job is answered by Sophar the Naamathite (Job xi, 7-10):

“Peradventure thou wilt comprehend the steps of God,  
And wilt find out the Almighty perfectly?  
He is higher than heaven, and what wilt thou do?  
He is deeper than hell and how wilt thou know?  
The measure of Him is longer than the earth  
And broader than the sea.  
If He shall overturn all things, or shall press them together,  
Who shall contradict Him?”

In both citations the holy writers take a static view of God's relation to the soul, while Thompson's entire concept is dynamic. The whole story of Saul, unhorsed on the road to Damascus, approximates more nearly the present theme. “And as he went on his journey, it came to pass that he drew nigh to Damascus and suddenly a light from heaven shined round about him, and falling to the ground, he heard a voice saying to him: Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? Who said: Who art thou, Lord? And He: I am Jesus whom thou persecutest. It is hard for thee to kick against the goad. And he trembling and astonished said: Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?” (Acts ix, 3-6). Saul had kicked against the goad by gazing with blinded eyes on the miracles of the early Church and the wondrous sanctity of her first-born children and by turning a deaf ear to

Stephen's inspired words. But now One greater than he, has hurled him to the ground and from the earth rises the new man, "Paul a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated unto the gospel of God" (Romans i, 1); "from henceforth let no man be troublesome to me: for I bear the brand-marks of the Lord Jesus in my body" (Galatians vi, 17). From that time on Paul was God's man wholly and entirely.

Outside the inspired pages of Holy Scripture we find other songs to tell us of this flight. In shorter compass the poet Archbishop, Richard Chenevix Trench, briefly yet strongly pictures the inevitable outcome of such vagrancy:

"If there had anywhere appeared in space  
Another place of refuge where to flee,  
My soul had found a refuge in that place  
And not in Thee.

But only when I found in earth and air  
And heaven and hell that such could nowhere be,  
That I could not flee from Thee anywhere  
I fled to Thee."

Again with lesser note Father Tabb has sung in one of his famous quatrains, "The Wanderer":

"For one astray, behold  
The Master, leaves the ninety and the nine,  
Nor rest till, love-controlled,  
The Discord moves in Harmony divine.

Greater than either of these is the strong passage in "Idylls of the King," where, in "The Holy Grail," Sir Percivale tells the monk Ambrosius of his quest. The parting tournament has been held and Percivale had shown unwonted strength of arm and then the morrow came and he went forth with his fellow-knights to seek the Holy Grail:

"And I was lifted up in heart, and thought  
Of all my late-shown prowess in the lists,  
How my strong lance had beaten down the knights,  
So many and famous names; and never yet  
Had heaven appeared so blue, nor earth so green,  
For all my blood danced in me, and I knew  
That I should light upon the Holy Grail.

Thereafter the dark warning of our King,  
That most of us would follow wandering fires,  
Came like a driving gloom across my mind.  
Then every evil word I had spoken once,  
And every evil thought I had thought of old,  
And every evil deed I did,  
Awoke and cried, 'This Quest is not for thee.'  
And lifting up mine eyes, I found myself  
Alone, and in a land of sand and thorns,  
And I was thirsty even unto death;  
And I, too cried, 'This Quest is not for thee.'

And on I rode, and when I thought my thirst  
Would slay me, saw deep lawns, and then a brook,  
With one sharp rapid, where the crisping white

Play'd ever back upon the sloping wave,  
And took both ear and eye; and o'er the brook  
Were apple-trees, and apples by the brook  
Fallen, and on the lawns. 'I will rest here,'  
I said, 'I am not worthy of the Quest;'  
But even while I drank the brook, and ate  
The goodly apples, all these things at once  
Fell into dust, and I was left alone,  
And thirsting, in a land of sand and thorns.

And then behold a woman at a door  
Spinning; and fair the house whereby she sat,  
And kind the woman's eyes and innocent,  
And all her bearing gracious; and she rose  
Opening her arms to meet me, as who should say,  
'Rest here;' but when I touched her, lo! she, too,  
Fell into dust and nothing, and the house  
Became no better than a broken shed,  
And in it a dead babe; and also this  
Fell into dust, and I was left alone.

And on I rode, and greater was my thirst.  
Then flash'd a yellow gleam across the world,  
And where it smote the ploughshare in the field,  
The ploughman left his ploughing, and fell down  
Before it; where it glitter'd on her pail,  
The milkmaid left her milking, and fell down  
Before it, and I knew not why, but thought  
'The sun is rising,' tho' the sun had risen.  
Then was I ware of one that on me moved  
In golden armor with a crown of gold  
About a casque all jewels; and his horse



In golden armor jewell'd everywhere:  
And on the splendor came, flashing me blind;  
And seem'd to me the Lord of all the world,  
Being so huge. But when I thought he meant  
To crush me, moving on me, lo! he, too,  
Open'd his arms to embrace me as he came,  
And up I went and touch'd him, and he, too,  
Fell into dust, and I was left alone,  
And wearying in a land of sand and thorns.

And I rode on and found a mighty hill,  
And on the top, a city wall'd: the spires  
Prick'd with incredible pinnacles into heaven  
And by the gateway stirr'd a crowd; and these  
Cried to me climbing, 'Welcome, Percivale!  
Thou mightiest and thou purest among men!'  
And glad was I and clomb, but found at top  
No man, nor any voice. And thence I past  
Far thro' a ruinous city, and saw  
That man had once dwelt there; but there I found  
Only one man of an exceeding age.  
'Where is that goodly company,' said I,  
'That so cried out upon me?' and he had  
Scarce any voice to answer, and yet gasp'd,  
'Whence and what art thou?' and even as he spoke  
Fell into dust, and disappear'd, and I  
Was left alone once more, and cried in grief,  
'Lo, if I find the Holy Grail itself  
And touch it, it will crumble into dust.'

And thence I dropt into a lowly vale,  
Low as the hill was high, and where the vale

Was lowest, found a chapel, and thereby  
A holy hermit in a hermitage,  
To whom I told my phantoms, and he said:  
'O son, thou hast not true humility,  
The highest virtue, mother of them all;  
For when the Lord of all things made Himself  
Naked of glory for His mortal change,  
"Take thou my robe," she said, "for all is thine,"  
And all her form shone forth with sudden light  
So that the angels were amazed, and she  
Follow'd him down, and like a flying star  
Led on the gray-hair'd wisdom of the East;  
But her thou hast not known; for what is this  
Thou thoughtest of thy prowess and thy sins?  
Thou hast not lost thyself to save thyself  
As Galahad.'"

Lack of lowliness of mind has caused all things to fade upon his touch and has robbed them of the little power they rightfully had to give some comfort to his soul. Undue love of self works havoc in the soul nor is the Holy Grail seen by Percivale, until Galahad—

"Drew me, with power upon me, till I grew  
One with him to believe as he believed."

Organically blending throughout the poem with this dominant idea of God's persistency in "hound-ing" the soul not to death but to life is the thought that God afflicts man in order to bring him back to Him. This is written large on almost every page of

Scripture yet nowhere perhaps more clearly or more poignantly than in the threnody of Jeremias (Lamentations iii, 1-17, 22-23, 31-33):

"I am the man that see my poverty  
By the rod of His indignation.  
He hath led me and brought me into darkness,  
And not into light.  
Only against me He hath turned and turned again  
His hand all the day.  
My skin and my flesh He hath made old,  
He hath broken my bones.  
He hath built round about me, and He hath compassed me  
With gall and labor.  
He hath set me in dark places  
As those that are dead forever.  
He hath built against me round about that I may not get  
out;  
He hath made my fetters heavy.  
Yea, and when I cry and entreat,  
He hath shut out my prayer.  
He hath shut up my way with square stones,  
He hath turned my paths upside down.  
He is become to me as a bear lying in wait,  
As a lion in secret places.  
He hath turned aside my paths and broken me in pieces,  
He hath made me desolate.  
He hath bent His bow and set me  
As a mark for His arrows.  
He hath shot into my veins  
The daughters of His quiver.

I am made a derision to all my people,  
 Their song all the day long.  
 He hath filled me with bitterness,  
 He hath inebriated me with wormwood.  
 And He hath broken my teeth one by one,  
 He hath fed me with ashes.  
 And my soul is removed far off from peace;  
 I have forgotten good things.

. . . . .  
 The mercies of the Lord, that we are not consumed;  
 Because His commiserations have not failed.  
 They are new every morning;  
 Great is Thy faithfulness.

. . . . .  
 For the Lord will not cast off  
 Forever.  
 For if He will cast off, He will also have mercy  
 According to the multitude of His mercies.  
 For He hath not willingly afflicted  
 Nor cast off the children of men."

There the whole story is told as it ought to be told. Sorrow and pain and disappointment are sent by God for one's good, and when they are recognized as so sent, they lead the soul back to God's welcoming arms. It is a strong grace from God when we can see that all our trials come upon us because He wills it so, that they are all "shade of His hand outstretched caressingly"; a blessed hour when with true humility we recognize and admit our waywardness and yield—and then hear the welcome: "Rise, clasp my hand and come."



## THE HOUND OF HEAVEN

I FLED Him, down the nights and down the days;  
I fled Him, down the arches of the years;  
I fled Him, down the labyrinthine ways  
Of my own mind; and in the mist of tears  
I hid from Him, and under running laughter. 5

Up vistaed hopes, I sped;  
And shot, precipitated  
Adown Titanic glooms of chasmèd fears,  
From those strong Feet that followed, followed  
after.

But with unhurrying chase, 10  
And unperturbèd pace,  
Deliberate speed, majestic instancy,  
They beat—and a Voice beat  
More instant than the Feet—  
“All things betray thee, who betrayest Me.” 15

I pleaded, outlaw-wise,  
By many a hearted casement, curtained red,  
Trellised with intertwining charities;  
(For, though I knew His love Who followed,  
Yet was I sore adread 20

Lest, having Him, I must have naught beside) -

But, if one little casement parted wide,

The gust of His approach would clash it to.

Fear wist not to evade as Love wist to pursue. †

Across the margent of the world I fled, 25

And troubled the gold gateways of the stars,

Smiting for shelter on their clangèd bars;

Fretted to dulcet jars

And silvern chatter the pale ports o' the moon.

I said to dawn: Be sudden—to eve: Be soon; 30

With thy young skiey blossoms heap me over

From this tremendous Lover!

Float thy vague veil about me, lest He see!

I tempted all His servitors, but to find

My own betrayal in their constancy, 35

In faith to Him their fickleness to me,

Their traitorous trueness, and their loyal deceit.

To all swift things for swiftness did I sue;

Clung to the whistling mane of every wind.

But whether they swept, smoothly fleet, 40

The long savannahs of the blue;

Or whether, Thunder-driven,

They clangèd His chariot 'thwart a heaven,

Plashy with flying lightnings round the spurn o' their  
feet:—

Fear wist not to evade as Love wist to pursue. — 45

Still with unhurrying chase,

And unperturbèd pace,

Deliberate speed, majestic instancy,

Came on the following Feet,  
And a Voice above their beat— 50  
“Naught shelters thee, who wilt not shelter  
Me.”

I sought no more that, after which I strayed,  
In face of man or maid;  
But still within the little children's eyes  
Seems something, something that replies, 55  
*They* at least are for me, surely for me!  
I turned me to them very wistfully;  
But just as their young eyes grew sudden fair  
With dawning answers there,  
Their angel plucked them from me by the hair. 60  
“Come then, ye other children, Nature's—share  
With me” (said I) “your delicate fellowship;  
Let me greet you lip to lip,  
Let me twine with you caresses,  
Wantoning 65  
With our Lady-Mother's vagrant tresses,  
Banqueting  
With her in her wind-walled palace,  
Underneath her azured daïs,  
Quaffing, as your taintless way is, 70  
From a chalice  
Lucent-weeping out of the dayspring.”  
So it was done:  
*I* in their delicate fellowship was one—  
Drew the bolt of Nature's secrecies. 75

*I* knew all the swift importings  
 On the wilful face of skies;  
 I knew how the clouds arise  
 Spumèd of the wild sea-snortings;  
     All that's born or dies 80  
 Rose and drooped with—made them shapers  
 Of mine own moods, or wailful or divine—  
     With them joyed and was bereaven.  
     I was heavy with the even,  
 When she lit her glimmering tapers 85  
     Round the day's dead sanctities.  
     I laughed in the morning's eyes.  
 I triumphed and I saddened with all weather,  
     Heaven and I wept together,  
 And its sweet tears were salt with mortal mine; 90  
 Against the red throb of its sunset-heart  
     I laid my own to beat,  
     And share commingling heat;  
 But not by that, by that, was eased my human smart.  
 In vain my tears were wet on Heaven's grey cheek. 95  
 For, ah! we know not what each other says,  
     These things and I; in sound *I* speak—  
*Their* sound is but their stir, they speak by silences.  
 Nature, poor stepdame, cannot slake my drouth;  
     Let her, if she would owe me, 100  
 Drop yon blue bosom-veil of sky, and show me  
     The breasts o' her tenderness:  
 Never did any milk of hers once bless  
     My thirsting mouth.



Nigh and nigh draws the chase, 105  
With unperturbèd pace,  
Deliberate speed, majestic instancy,  
And past those noisèd Feet  
A Voice comes yet more fleet—  
“Lo! naught contents thee, who content’st not  
Me.” 110

Naked I wait Thy love’s uplifted stroke!  
My harness piece by piece Thou hast hewn from me,  
And smitten me to my knee;  
I am defenceless utterly.  
I slept, methinks, and woke 115  
And, slowly gazing, find me stripped in sleep.  
In the rash lustihead of my young powers,  
I shook the pillaring hours  
And pulled my life upon me; grimed with smears,  
I stand amid the dust o’ the mounded years— 120  
My mangled youth lies dead beneath the heap,  
My days have crackled and gone up in smoke,  
Have puffed and burst as sun-starts on a stream.

Yea, faileth now even dream  
The dreamer, and the lute the lutanist; 125  
Even the linked fantasies, in whose blossomy twist  
I swung the earth a trinket at my wrist,  
Are yielding; cords of all too weak account  
For earth with heavy griefs so overplussed.

Ah! is Thy love indeed 130  
A weed, albeit an amaranthine weed,

Suffering no flowers except its own to mount?

Ah! must—

Designer Infinite!—

Ah! must Thou char the wood ere Thou canst limn  
with it? 135

My freshness spent its wavering shower i' the dust;

And now my heart is as a broken fount,

Wherein tear-drippings stagnate, spilt down ever

From the dank thoughts that shiver

Upon the sighful branches of my mind. 140

Such is; what is to be?

The pulp so bitter, how shall taste the rind?

I dimly guess what Time in mists confounds;

Yet ever and anon a trumpet sounds

From the hid battlements of Eternity; 145

Those shaken mists a space unsettle, then

Round the half-glimpsèd turrets slowly wash again;

But not ere him who summoneth

I first have seen, enwound

With glooming robes purpureal, cypress-crowned; 150

His name I know, and what his trumpet saith.

Whether man's heart or life it be which yields

Thee harvest, must Thy harvest fields

Be dunged with rotten death?

Now of that long pursuit 155

Comes on at hand the bruit;

That Voice is round me like a bursting sea;

"And is thy earth so marred,

Shattered in shard on shard?

Lo, all things fly thee, for thou fliest Me! 160

Strange, piteous, futile thing!

Wherefore should any set thee love apart?

Seeing none but I make much of naught" (He said),

"And human love needs human meriting:

How hast thou merited— 165

Of all man's clotted clay, the dingiest clot?

Alack, thou knowest not

How little worthy of any love thou art!

Whom wilt thou find to love ignoble thee,

Save Me, save only Me? 170

All which I took from thee I did but take,

Not for thy harms,

But just that thou might'st seek it in My arms.

All which thy child's mistake

Fancies as lost, I have stored for thee at home: 175

Rise, clasp My hand, and come."

Halts by me that footfall:

Is my gloom, after all,

Shade of His hand, outstretched caressingly?

"Ah, fondest, blindest, weakest, 180

I am He Whom thou seekest!

Thou dravest love from thee, who dravest Me."





## NOTES

**Hound of Heaven.**—With felicitous grace and reverential delicacy Thompson gives Our Lord an unwonted and daring title and throughout the poem never once explicitly refers to the metaphor. A lesser writer would inevitably have rendered the comparison very repellent. The fuller development is left to our own devotional, inward thoughts.

Thompson, of course, had Scriptural warrant for using such type of comparisons from the animal world. No phrase of Holy Writ is more current than "the *Lamb* of God" (St. John i, 29, 36; Apoc. v, 12, vi, 16, vii, 14). Each Holy Week we hear Isaias' plaint (Isaias liii, 7): "He shall be led as a *sheep* to the slaughter and shall be dumb as a *lamb* before his shearer," which thought is repeated in Acts viii, 32. Opening the Apocalypse once more we find another metaphor (Apocalypse v, 5): "And one of the Ancients said to me: "Weep not; behold the *lion* of the tribe of Juda, the root of David, hath prevailed to open the book." Lastly we find another metaphor in St. Paul (Hebrews xiii, 11-12), where with true and sound literary instinct he applies the symbolism of the offering but not the name to Our Lord, thus reversing the present process of Thompson: "For the bodies of those beasts, whose blood is brought into the holies by the high priest for sin, are burned without the camp. Wherefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people by His own blood, suffered without the gate."

### *Lines 1-15*

With the bold inclusive sweep of genius, Thompson in these first verses outlines the whole scope of the poem and suggests

unmistakably its outcome. The merely material picture of these lines is noteworthy: a branching path, a portico, a maze, a mist, a sparkling stream, a forest glade and lastly a vast canyon.

*Line 1.* With another masterly stroke, we are given the scope of the poem in the first three words "*I fled Him.*" That this is the central thought is still further accentuated by the presence of the comma after "Him," and the repetition of the phrase at the beginning of the second and third lines.

The reason of the flight is given us in lines 19-21, and it is a misguided love of self not catching even the surface meaning of those compelling words of Our Lord: "He that will save his life, shall lose it: and he that shall lose his life for My sake shall find it" (St. Matthew xvi, 25). St. Augustine says so well: "Accordingly, two cities have been formed by two loves: the earthly, by the love of self even to the contempt of God; the heavenly, by the love of God even to the contempt of self. The former, in a word, glories in itself; the latter in the Lord" (City of God, Bk. XIV, 28). Yet throughout the poem it is quite essential to remember that there is no suggestion of unholy love. It is all a misguided quest, a seeking for heart's ease there where it cannot be found. In the end the cheated soul will bewail its folly as did the Jews of old, who had put their trust in Egypt and Ethiopia, only to find, in the defeat of these, their own undoing. "And they shall be afraid, and ashamed of Ethiopia, their hope, and of Egypt, their glory. And the inhabitants of this isle shall say: "Lo, this was our hope, to whom we fled for help to deliver us from the face of the Assyrians, and how shall we be able to escape?" (Isaias xx, 5, 6).

**Nights and Days.**—Not merely "always," but through sunshine and darkness, both physical, mental, and spiritual. Such indeed is the underlying thought of lines 1-9.

*Line 2. Arches of the Years.*—Life is pictured as a journey

down a long colonnade, each arch of which is a year. By such imagery, the poet conveys to us the fact that the flight from God, though swift in action, was not swift in time, for it lengthened out into years. Compare line 9 and note.

*Line 3. Labyrinthine Ways.*—The mind's unlimited capacity of grasping and dwelling on objects without number seemed to give hope of escape. Compare "losing one's self in thought."

Many a soul has tried to lose sight of God by study and research, and some have—all too unfortunately—succeeded in losing Him in perplexed and specious reasonings into which they have wandered as into a labyrinth.

*Line 4.* Tennyson (In Memoriam, Canto xxiv) speaks of "the haze of grief." Grief and its subsequent tears drives many a man to God, for as Dante says: "Sorrow re-marries us to God"; but others again it hurries away from God and leads them to seek help from fellow-creatures alone, as did the Jews when threatened by the Assyrians: "Wo to them that go down to Egypt for help, trusting in horses, and putting their confidence in chariots, because they are many; and in horsemen, because they are very strong; and have not trusted in the Holy One of Israel, and have not sought after the Lord. . . . Egypt is man and not God: and their horses flesh, and not spirit; and the Lord shall put down His hand, and the helper shall fall, and he that is helped shall fall and they shall all be confounded together. For thus saith the Lord to me: Like as the lion roareth, and the lion's whelp upon his prey, and when a multitude of shepherds shall come against him, he will not fear at their voice, nor be afraid of their multitude, so shall the Lord of hosts come down to fight upon Mount Sion, and upon the hills thereof. As birds flying, so will the Lord of hosts protect Jerusalem, protecting and delivering, passing over and saving" (Isaias xxxi, 1, 3-5).

Homer (Iliad iii, 10-12) gives a fine picture of the hiding power of the mist: "Even as when the south wind sheddeth

mist over the crests of a mountain, mist unwelcome to the shepherd, but to the robber better than night, and a man can see no further than he casteth a stone. . . ." (Lang, Leaf, & Myers Translation). It was the soul's endeavor to hide behind such hopeless, stubborn grief that hung between God and itself like a cloud.

*Lines 4-5. Tears—Laughter.*—Pain and pleasure alike were sought as guides away from God; but neither could dull the fundamental yearning, coextensive with itself, of the human soul for God. This elemental craving for complete happiness, ever elusive in this world, where sunshine and shadow play upon us so constantly, is one of the strong rational proofs for a life beyond the grave where God will be possessed unendingly.

*Line 5. Running Laughter.*—We often speak of a smile "rippling" over one's face.

*Line 6. Vistaed Hopes.*—Hopes which when realized would last, not for a moment and then fade away, but would reach out into time as vistas reach out into space. Thus when we gaze with longing towards such hopes, they seem "vistaed."

*Lines 6-7.* Note striking contrast—Up vistaed hopes I sped, and *shot*, etc. When hope lights our way, our journey is indeed swift; but who has not felt the hurtling force of gloom and desolation, when from the heights of hope we are "shot" into the abyss of "chasmèd fears" with heart-sickening speed? It is of this the Psalmist speaks (Psalm xxix, 6-8):

"For wrath is in His indignation,

And life in His good will.

In the evening weeping shall have place,

And in the morning gladness.

And in my abundance I said:

'I shall never be moved.'

O Lord, in Thy favor, Thou gavest strength to my beauty,

Thou turnedst away Thy face from me, and I became troubled."



Note further that when hope led him on, the motion of traveling was his own—"I sped," but when grief came upon him he was hurled with a motion not his own. Fear being "the yielding up of the powers of succour from thought," the soul is no longer in control of its actions.

*Line 8. Adown.*—Conveys the impression of falling continually and ever lower. The onomatopœia of the line is noteworthy.

**Titantic Glooms.**—Glooms that were not only broad and high and so enveloping that into their nether darkness no ray of hope could steal, but almost brutish in their aggressiveness against the soul. Then it is that soul-paralysis is wont to come, unless the light of faith has been kept burning in our hearts "as a light shining in a dark place" (2 Peter i, 19). This line recalls Dante's *Inferno* and Doré's illustrations thereof. *Titanic* is meant undoubtedly to recall the war of the Titans against the gods, so frequently read in pagan mythology.

*Line 9. Strong Feet.*—By a happy use of "transferred epithet," strong is applied to the feet rather than to the whole man. "Strong" foretells the end of the pursuit, for "the strong win the race."

**Followed, Followed.**—The repetition continues to convey subtly the idea of a long and persistent pursuit. (Cf. line 2 and note.)

#### *Lines 10-15*

Three several times (lines 10-15, 46-51, 105-110), does this refrain occur; and it is in great measure by means of this subtle suggestion that we are made aware of the progress of the pursuit, until we read in line 177 "Halts by me that footfall."

The slow majestic rhythm of these lines is in itself symbolic of the poise of the Pursuer, and markedly so, coming as they do after the swift sweep of the preceding lines.

As we read this refrain and grasp the central idea of the poem, we may recall the words of the Psalmist (Psalm xviii, 6, 7):

“He hath rejoiced as a giant to run the way:

His going out is from the end of heaven,

And his circuit even to the end thereof:

And there is none that can hide himself from his heat.”

*Line 10.* Note the oxymorons in this and the following lines.

*Line 12. Deliberate Speed.*—The pursuit was deliberately entered upon, and the speed was not precipitate or impetuous. The result is inevitable. The pursuit of the soul by God is not the result of a chance whim, for to predicate such of God were contradictory and blasphemous: “Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love. Therefore have I drawn thee, taking pity on thee” (Jeremias xxxi, 3).

*Instancy.*—Cf. note on line 14.

*Line 13. A Voice Beat.*—Its beat was as rhythmical as man’s own heart, and stirred up within him the beat of the deathless voice of conscience.

*Line 14. Instant.*—In its radical sense of *pressing upon, urgent* (Latin *in & sto*). Thompson was fond of bringing words back to their original meaning. Compare lines 49, 66. (This tendency is evidenced by many modern writers and is one of the ways by which a language rejuvenates itself, e. g., “the intolerable face of God,” where intolerable is used in its root sense, shorn of any acquired, sinister meaning.)

*Line 15.* The words are not understood by the soul nor does it practically realize that “it is hard for thee to kick against the goad” (Acts ix, 5), which in every case is the grace of God urging on to greater love of Him alone. It has yet to learn under the flail of suffering and withered hopes that “there is no wisdom, there is no prudence, there is no counsel against the Lord” (Proverbs xxi, 30). Then and then only will the soul

cry out, "Too late have I learned to love thee"; and shall warn other souls: "Remember thy Creator in the days of thy youth, before the time of affliction come, and the years draw nigh of which thou shalt say: They please me not: Before the sun, and the light, and the moon, and the stars be darkened, and the clouds return after the rain . . . before the silver cord be broken, and the golden fillet shrink back, and the pitcher be crushed at the fountain, and the wheel be broken upon the cistern, and the dust return into the earth, from whence it was, and the spirit return to God, who gave it. Vanity of vanities . . . and all things are vanity" (Ecclesiastes xii, 1-7).

**Betray.**—By refusing to harbor and conceal. In this line the poet gives us a distinct fore-view of the outcome of the pursuit.

*Lines 16-24*

The soul is pictured as pleading for shelter at a human heart, which is likened to a cottage, with little casement windows. The human heart is indeed small, for it is earthly and therefore only a poor "clay-shuttered" cottage, doomed one day to house devouring worms as its latest dwellers.

*Line 16. I Pleaded.*—There was all the poignancy of a lonely soul crowded into that cry for harborage.

**Outlaw-Wise.**—Because he was fleeing from Him who is Justice itself and to whom all order is due, a fugitive from Divine Law and the God who would make him a prisoner of love.

*Line 17.* Compare "Arras'd in purple like the house of kings" (An Anthem of Earth). These and other metaphors concerning the heart are thought by some to be due to Thompson's study of medicine. Compare the concluding lines of "An Arab Love Song":

"And thou—what needest with thy tribes' black tents  
Who hast the red pavilion of my heart?"

*Line 18. Intertwining Charities.*—So manifold and so interlacing were these charities that they quite covered the whole heart, thus they made it susceptible to every appeal and promised a secure and inviolate refuge once the assured admittance was gained. The casement, being here the human heart, is trellised not merely with the vine of the love of God but also with the love of creatures. We may paraphrase and read: I knew His love but felt that if I surrendered directly to Him, there would be nothing for self; and so I sought a compromise in a heart where there were heavenly and earthly loves interlaced, where I could love God in the creature and the creature too, and there find a reciprocated love from that creature.

*Line 19. I Knew.*—This knowledge was as yet purely theoretical and imperfect. Such knowledge every Christian, even the most ignorant, possesses. When, however, it becomes practical, then a vitalizing force is thrown into life which carries on swiftly to the stark grandeur of a saint.

*Line 20.* All have heard the words of God: "I am the Lord thy God, mighty, jealous" (Exodus xx, 5), and again: "The Lord His name is Jealous; He is a jealous God" (Exodus xxxiv, 14). Again they have listened time and again to the words of our Lord Himself: "If any man come to Me and hate not his father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yea and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple" (St. Luke xiv, 26). All have heard indeed, but many have misread these words. Even though we had never heard His other commands: "Honor thy father and thy mother, that thou mayest be long-lived upon the land which the Lord thy God will give thee" (Exodus xx, 12), and again: "Husbands love your wives, as Christ also loved the Church and delivered Himself up for it" (Ephesians v, 25); even though we were ignorant of the fact that to "hate," in the language which our Lord spoke, in such setting means "to love less" (as in Mal-



achias i, 2-3, "I have loved Jacob but have hated Esau"); sound spiritual reasoning would tell us that He did not mean to undo all natural or acquired love. What He did mean was:

1. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart and with thy whole soul, and with all thy strength and with all thy mind" (St. Luke x, 27). If any lower love runs counter to this love of God, we must be done with the baser love;
2. That, though we do love others, we must love all in God and for God, i. e., love them because He commands us to love them, and as He commands us, always remembering that any goodness or holiness or excellence we find in them is but a faint reflection of His infinite perfections: "They are but broken lights of Thee, and Thou, O Lord art more than they" (In Memoriam).

"God gave us love, something to love He only lent."

It is a wholly wrong grasp of this principle that makes many beginners in the spiritual life experience that fear of which Thompson here tells. A foreseen isolation of loneliness then makes the spiritual life an unbearable yoke to them. Unquestionably for those who find it in their hearts to strive for the higher planes of holiness and imperatively for all who have vowed themselves to a religious life of celibacy, much pruning and cutting of earthly affections is necessary. Each such is indeed—

"Chosen of God his lonely way to wend,  
Out from all glare and glory to the shade,  
The shadow of the Cross where saints are made?"

Yes, it seems a lonely way to those who know not the music that is in the heart as it travels alone with God. It is not, however, beginners only who feel this dread of God. Even the Saints at times were wont to struggle against God, especially in His more marvelous manifestations of special affection. Thus St. Theresa tells us of her struggle against being miraculously elevated off the ground into the air while in prayer:

"I repeat it; you feel and see yourself carried away you know not whither. For though we feel how delicious it is, yet the weakness of our nature makes us afraid at first . . . so trying is it that I would very often resist and exert all my strength, particularly at those times when the rapture was coming on me in public. I did so, too, very often when I was alone, because I was afraid of delusions. Occasionally I was able, by great efforts, to make a slight resistance, but afterwards I was worn out, like a person who had been contending with a strong giant; at other times it was impossible to resist at all." (The Month, April, 1919, p. 274.)

*Line 20. Sore Adread.*—There is no pain like to this anguish of the soul that is face to face with a great renunciation for God and finds not within itself sufficient generosity to make the surrender. "He is wise in heart and mighty in strength. Who hath resisted Him and hath found peace?" (Job ix, 4). "Too grasping is that heart for which God is not enough." Unhappily the purview of the soul is often so straightly shortened by the flickering lights and shadows of this vale of tears, that it cannot realize that it is well to say, "I'd rather walk in the dark with God, than go alone in the light." Indeed, when God is not with us all light is real darkness; whereas God, Eternal Light, makes the noon of night as the brightest summer sky.

*Line 21. Naught Beside.*—In the Old Testament (e. g., Genesis xvii, 1, Exodus vi, 3, etc.), God is called in the Hebrew text "EL SCHADDAI" "God our Sufficiency." Such He is indeed and He alone, and such He will prove to be to us in Heaven; but here in this land of exile our faith grows dull at times and we would fain find "our sufficiency" in things of sense and of time.

Commenting on this sacred name, the learned and saintly Cornelius a Lapide, S. J., writes (Genesis xvii, 1):

"God therefore is our SCHADDAI, who satisfies, who sates each craving of ours with good things. Why, then, unhappy

man, do you stray through many things, seek rest and do not find it? Do you love riches? You will not be satisfied, for they are not SCHADDAI. Do you love honors? You will not be filled, for they are not SCHADDAI. Do you love the gracefulness and the beauty of the body? They are not your SCHADDAI. Oh, heart of man, unworthy heart, heart that hast known sorrows, that hast been crushed by sorrows, why will you make your search through vain and frail and short-lived and deceitful goods? Not by them can the hunger, not by them can the thirst of the soul be allayed. Love your true SCHADDAI. He alone can fill every corner of your soul, He alone can quench your thirst with a rushing stream, yea, with an ocean of pleasures, since the fount of life is within Him. To the mind He is the fulness of light, to the will a manifold peace, to the memory a continuation of eternity."

St. Augustine tells us: "Thou sufficest for God, let God suffice for thee."

*Line 22.* The human heart is indeed a "little casement"; for, though it opens itself widest, it can never satisfy in another human heart that craving which God alone can adequately allay.

*Line 23. Approach.*—Though the Pursuer has not yet come up, His very drawing near sharply closes the gates of the heart. Not indeed that the human heart, in whose love rest is sought, always withdraws its love; but the very nearness of God brings it to pass that the craving soul, from its side, finds no comfort in such proffered or even given love. Yes, even in hearts that love God and seek Him rightly, the increasing nearness of God, though it does not "clash to" the opened "little casements," does cause all human love to seem a poor, frail thing indeed, and not worth the earning, unless it be from a heart that is quite attuned to God.

*Gust—Clash.*—The words convey perfectly the idea of great speed in the pursuit.

*Line 24.* All the peevish ingenuity of the soul, afraid to give itself to God, finds itself completely checkmated by the pursuing love of God for it, even as a petulant child, who would run away to its harm, cannot elude the watchful eye of its mother. With the "little casement" clashed to, the fugitive must be off again and seek new harbor.

*Lines 25-51*

In these lines the soul is pictured as seeking a refuge in the broad expanse of the heavens. It goes to the stars and the moon, to the day and to the night, to all the winds, only to find its "own betrayal in their constancy." The conviction of its own uneased heart is voiced by the Pursuer in line 51 "Naught shelters thee, who will not shelter Me."

*Lines 25-26.* The image here needs clarifying. Frustrated in his quest for love from men, he flees across the margin or margin of the world, i. e., out beyond the bounds of this small earth of ours and comes to the stars, which are pictured as having gateways of gold. At the bars of these gates, he knocks sharply and impatiently (*smiting*), making them resound loudly (*clangèd bars*, by prolepsis). Then he hurries across to the moon, which is pictured as a shadowy castle (*pale ports* conveying this image), at whose huge silver doors he beats for entrance, thus making them ring with that pleasing discord peculiar to silver.

In lines 16-23 the picture of a lowly cottage was given, as fit symbol of the human heart. Here, in keeping with our wonted thoughts of the skies, a firm-built castle is portrayed with its "gold gateways," "clangèd bars," "pale ports."

*Line 25. Across the Margent of the World.*—If the soul sought aright, the stars and the heavens would bring it comfort. A Monica and an Augustine, as they sat the long evenings out on the balcony at Rome, knew how to find in the stars a



pathway unto God. Yes, and when centuries had passed, Ignatius, the one-time cavalier of Spain, would rise from like contemplation of the heavens with his wonted cry: "How base do earthly things become to me, when I gaze upon the heavens." Foolish soul that has forgotten the hymn of its childhood days:

"Out beyond the shining,  
Of the farthest star,  
Thou art ever stretching,  
Infinitely far."

Thus its hope of escape is fruitless. See Psalm cxxxviii (quoted in Preface, p. vii).

*Line 26. Troubled.*—Shows fretful anxiety to enter. It moreover hints at the peace and gentle quiet of the heavens. Rebel man alone brings discord.

*Line 28. Fretted.*—Carries on the idea conveyed by "troubled." The petulant haste of the outlaw marring the quiet of the stars. The "dulcet jars" reminds one of "symphonia discors" of Horace.

*Line 30. To Dawn: Be Sudden.*—The coming of dawn always seems a sudden thing. Indeed we speak of the "day-break," just as centuries ago the Hebrews named the dawn, "boqer" (from the root baqar to "cleave," "open"), the "cleaver" of the darkness.

Note the impatience so characteristic of the sick, above all of the sick of mind. When man is trying to get away from the voice of conscience and of God, the worst terror is to lack constant change and thus be thrown back on self and self-introspection. In Deuteronomy xxviii, 65-67, God pictures such a visitation of soul-agony coming upon the Jews, if they violate His law: "Neither shalt thou be quiet, even in those nations, nor shall there be any rest for the sole of thy foot. For the Lord will give thee a fearful heart, and languishing eyes, and a soul consumed with pensiveness: and thy life shall be as

it were hanging before thee. Thou shalt fear night and day, neither shalt thou trust thy life. In the morning thou shalt say: Who will grant me evening? and at evening: Who will grant me morning? for the fearfulness of thy heart, wherewith thou shalt be terrified, and for those things which thou shalt see with thy eyes."

Thompson must often have felt thus during his days of penury in London. The following lines speak eloquently (Sister Songs, Part 1st):

"Forlorn, and faint, and stark,  
I had endured through watches of the dark  
The abashless inquisition of each star,  
Yea, was the outcast mark  
Of all those heavenly passers' scrutiny;  
Stood bound and helplessly  
For Time to shoot his barbèd minutes at me;  
Suffered the trampling hoof of every hour  
In night's slow-wheelèd car;  
Until the tardy dawn dragged me at length  
From under those dread wheels; and, bled of strength,  
I waited the inevitable last."

*Line 31.* If the soul, yet in this vale of tears, wherein God's "mercy most delights to spare," would only realize that God's pursuit is not one of vengeful wrath but a pursuit to rescue it from its own folly, then this desire to be hid from God would never find expression. Only when life is over and the condemnatory judgment is come, is there place and real reason for what we read so strongly put by St. John: "And the kings of the earth and the princes and the tribunes, and the rich and the strong and every bondman, and every freeman hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of mountains: and they shall say to the mountains and the rocks: Fall upon us and hide us from the face of Him that sitteth upon the throne, and from the



wrath of the Lamb" (Apocalypse vi, 15, 16). Sin alone can make us want to be away and hide from God. It was sin that staged the memorable scene in Paradise: "And when they heard the voice of the Lord God walking in paradise at the afternoon air, Adam and his wife hid themselves from the face of the Lord God, amidst the trees of paradise" (Genesis iii, 8).

Thompson's varied imagery of the sky is astounding. Compare lines 40-44, 68, 69, 77-79, 85, 86, 92, 95, 101. Compare Evangeline:

"Silently one by one, in the infinite meadows of heaven,  
Blossomed the lovely stars, the forget-me-nots of the Angels."

**Tremendous Lover.**—God is a *tremendous* Lover: (1) for His love is *eternal*—"Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love. Therefore I have drawn thee taking pity on thee" (Jeremias xxxi, 3); (2) for His love is *unsurpassed*. "Can a woman forget her infant, so as not to have pity on the son of her womb? And if she should forget, yet will I not forget thee" (Isaias xlix, 15); (3) for His love is *insistent*—for when God wills to win the full love of the human heart, there is no silencing His grace's knocking. "Behold I stand at the gate and knock" (Apocalypse iii, 20); (4) for His love is *munificent*—giving us gifts of inward grace in this life and a reward surpassing thought in the next. "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man, what things God hath prepared for them that love him" (1 Corinthians ii, 9); (5) for His love is *overwhelming*—of other saints than St. Francis Xavier has the following been told: "Francis was often overheard crying out during prayer, with his hands on his heart and eyes raised to heaven: "Basta ya, Señor, basta!" (Enough, Lord, enough). He was also known to open his soutane and pour water upon his chest, so ardent was the fire of divine love that inflamed his heart" (The Life of

St. Francis Xavier—M. T. Kelly, Ch. v); (6) for His love is *changeless*—"Jesus Christ yesterday, and to-day and the same forever" (Hebrews xiii, 8); (7) lastly (bringing "tremendous" back to its root sense of "making to fear") because His love is so great and so overwhelming and so exclusive that it does make the poor unschooled human soul fear the isolating greatness of this same love. Compare lines 19-21 and note.

*Line 33. Vague Veil.*—The veil of night is vague in itself and makes all objects vague. Thus would it be harder to be found by the Lover. Compare Dante (Inferno, Canto III):

"Various tongues

. . . . .  
Made up a tumult that forever whirls  
Round through the air with solid darkness stained,  
Like to the sand that in the whirlwind flies."

*Lines 34-37.* Inanimate nature is in its every component part a mirror of some excellence in God: the storm, of His power; the cataract, of His grandeur; the flower, of His beauty. Though we may misuse them, we can never change their nature; and thus they ever faithfully portray their Creator and remain loyal to Him. St. Ignatius in the meditation on "Personal Sin," after making us parade our sins before us and "weigh" them, and after making us pit our poor selves against God whom we have offended by thus misusing the wills He bestowed on us and the creatures He gave to us, suggests that there will come forth from our soul, "a cry of wonder with a flood of emotion, ranging in thought through all creatures,—how they have suffered me to live and have preserved me in life,—how the angels, being the sword of divine justice, have borne with me and guarded and prayed for me,—how the Saints have been interceding and praying for me,—and the heavens, sun, moon, stars and elements, fruits, birds, fishes and animals,—and the earth, how it has not opened to swallow me up, creating



new hells for my eternal torment therein" (Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius, translated by Rickaby, S. J.).

For the antithetical verbal structure of these lines we have many an example in the writings of St. Augustine. The following from Fr. A. J. Ryan's Nocturne sounds a like, though lesser, note:

"To be faithless oft means to be faithful,  
To be false often means to be true;  
The vale that loves clouds that are golden  
Forgets them for skies that are blue.

To forget often means to remember  
What we had forgotten too long;  
The fragrance is not the bright flower,  
The echo is not the sweet song."

Tennyson (Lancelot and Elaine) sings:

" . . . . . but now  
The shackles of an old love straightened him,  
His honor rooted in dishonor stood,  
And faith unfaithful kept him falsely true."

*Line 38.* Note the alliteration and the onomatopoetic effect in these lines. "To" with the verb "sue" is unusual. However compare "make suit to."

Compare a similar thought in Isaias xxx, 15, 16: "For thus saith the Lord God the Holy One of Israel: If you return and be quiet, you shall be saved: in silence and in hope shall your strength be. And you would not: but have said: No, but we will flee to horses: therefore shall you flee. And we will mount upon swift ones: therefore shall they be swifter that shall pursue after you."

*Line 39. Mane.*—In this one word the whole metaphor of the cloud-horses is foreshadowed.

*Line 40. Smoothly Fleet.*—Swift but not boisterous.

*Lines 41-42.* Differing interpretations have been made of these lines. i. "Swift" is intransitive and "long savannahs of the blue" is in apposition to "they." Thus the thought would be, that the breath of a quiet breeze on a clear blue day, makes us think that it has come from afar, and that it is very long like a "savannah." Compare "Wind of the Moor," by C. Scollard, especially the opening line: "Wind of the Moor, breath of the vast free reaches."

ii. "Swift" is transitive, governing "long savannahs." "The long savannahs of the blue" are then the blue dome of heaven itself.

*Line 42.* Compare Psalm ciii, 1-4:—

"Bless, the Lord, O my soul.

O Lord my God, Thou art exceeding great:

With splendor and glory art Thou clad,

Thou coverest Thyself with light as with a garment;

Spreadest out the heavens like a tent-cloth.

Who lays the beams of His upper-chambers in the waters;

Who makes the clouds His chariot:

Who makes His way on the wings of the wind;

Who makes his messengers winds:

His ministers a flaming fire."

"In these verses God is figured as an earthly potentate, clad in splendor, enthroned under a lofty canopy (= "tent-cloth"), possessing towering palaces, swift chariots, and a countless retinue" (M'Swiney, S. J., Translation of the Psalms and Canticles).

Again we read in Habacuc (iii, 8, 11): "Wast Thou angry, O Lord, with the rivers? Or was Thy wrath upon the rivers? Or Thy indignation in the sea? Who will ride upon Thy horses: and Thy chariots are salvation. . . . The sun and the moon

stood still in their habitation, in the light of Thy arrows, they shall go in the brightness of Thy glittering spear."

*Line 44.* Just as wildly charging horses strike fire from beneath their feet, so these heavenly steeds, the winds, awaken the lightnings as their feet "*spurn*" the ground, i. e., thrust the floor of heaven hurriedly away from them. We read in Thompson's Ode to the Setting Sun:—

"wide o'er rout-trampled night  
Flew spurned the pebbled stars."

*Line 45. Fear Wist Not.*—Fear could suggest no avenue, down which to flee, that Love could not and did not discover.

**Fear.**—It was indeed a purblind dread of this tremendous Lover that caused the flight.

*Line 49.* Note the strong, active sense of "following," a proper, but contrary to normal, usage, which offers the word in an inactive sense only, v. g., "the following paragraph." Compare note on line 14.

*Line 51.* Adam and Eve in the garden after their betrayal of God's trust, to keep their souls untarnished, found no place to shelter them "when they heard the voice of the Lord God walking in paradise at the afternoon air" (Genesis iii, 8).

#### *Lines 52-60*

Foiled of his purpose among the stars, he drops back to earth; but remembering his cheated dreams of winning satisfying love from older folk, he seeks in the love of children surcease of his pain.

*Line 52. That After Which I Strayed.*—The human heart is always consciously or unconsciously seeking the "perfect good," the possession of which will bring it perfect well-being and adequate happiness.

*Line 53.* Thompson's love of children was remarkable. Compare especially the ending of his poem "To my Godchild":

"For if in Eden as on earth are we,  
I sure shall keep a younger company:

. . . . .  
Look for me in the nurseries of Heaven."

Again, from *Sister Songs* (Part First):

"Then there came past  
A Child; like thee, a spring flower; but a flower  
Fallen from the budded coronal of Spring,  
And through the city-streets blown withering.  
She passed—O brave, sad, lovingest, tender thing!  
And of her own scant pittance did she give,  
That I might eat and live:  
Then fled, a swift and trackless fugitive.  
Therefore I kissed in thee  
The heart of Childhood, so divine for me."

Amongst the most remarkable of his children's poems are "Daisy," "The Poppy," "The Making of Viola," "Ex Ore Infantium," the last of which should be known to every child.

*Line 54. Still.*—Though adult human kind has failed to stay his quest, there does seem to remain hope of human love from children.

*Line 55.* Notice the indefinite "something" and the repetition of the same. What it was, the poet seemed not to know; and "just as their young eyes grew sudden fair, with dawning answers there," just as that intangible "something" seemed to be about to be rendered intelligible to him, the little children were snatched away—and his quest was on him again.

*Line 56. They at Least.*—There is a poignancy in these words that bespeak the soul's realization that it is playing a losing game that costs it much.



*Line 57.* The pathos of this line is splendid, its slow movement fitting in harmoniously with the thought. His soul-hunger is strong, very strong.

*Line 58.* A child's eyes "light up" when it has something good and pleasing to tell its comrades or its elders, for the eyes are the windows of the soul and the light of its joys and the shadows of its sorrows stream through those same windows. Compare the delicate poem of Castelli, "Vom Auge," two stanzas of which run thus:

"Es sind zwei kleine Fensterlein  
In einem grossen Haus,  
Da schaut die ganze Welt hinein  
Die ganze Welt heraus.

. . . . .  
. . . . .

Auch was der Hausherr denkt und fleht  
Malt er ans Fenster an,  
Dass jeder, der vorueber geht,  
Es deutlich sehen kann."

*Line 60. Their Angel Plucked Them.*—To save them from being means, albeit unwittingly, of aid to the soul's thievery of itself from God, since innocence must have no part in such sacrilege. A kind cruelty both to the soul and to the children. Probably Thompson wishes, too, to stress his own deeply-felt unworthiness and taintedness, as a reason for this sudden withdrawal of the innocents.

**Plucked Them.**—Suddenly and swiftly.

Did Thompson have in mind here the story of Ganymede of pagan mythology, and of Habacuc (Daniel xiv, 32-38)? He certainly had in mind the Catholic belief in Guardian Angels. It is indeed a commonplace of Catholic teaching that each one of us has an Angel to guard and protect us, above all in matters touching the soul. "See that you despise not one of these little

ones: for I say to you that their Angels in heaven always see the face of My Father, who is in heaven" (St. Matthew xviii, 10). What courage and confidence such a doctrine gives us, as from our earliest days we are schooled to kneel and pray:

"Angel of God, my guardian dear,  
To whom His love commits me here,  
Ever this day be at my side,  
To light, to guard, to rule and guide."

We may compare the thought expressed by Tennyson (Lancelot and Elaine) as Lancelot thinks upon his guilty past:

". . . But if I would not, then may God,  
I pray him, send a sudden Angel down  
To seize me by the hair and bear me far  
And fling me deep in that forgotten mere,  
Among the tumbled fragments of the hills."

*Lines 61-110*

The soul turns to Nature's children and tries to frame all its moods on theirs, hoping to be one with them in their "delicate fellowship," only to find that the human heart can secure no real sympathy from creatures that know not suffering. Indeed sympathy (from the Greek *συμπαύχειν*—to suffer along with) presupposes at least the capacity of suffering like pain.

*Lines 61-62.* This whole passage is a poetic flight full of vast imagery, and one does wrong to strain out laboriously a separate reason for every word. The main idea is clear. Nature is here pictured as a queen and mother, with the earth as her palace, which is walled round with winds. She is seated upon a throne or *daïs*, that is canopied over by the azure dome of Heaven. Within the palace, i. e., upon the earth, are Nature's children, the winds and the rain and the clouds, the trees and

plants and flowers, banqueting and drinking from chalices, which are filled with the pure light that is spilled abroad by the sun at day-break (*"lucent-weeping out of the day spring"*).

**Come Then.**—The petulancy and growing irritation of the thwarted soul is shown in the abrupt transition and appeal. Of all the attempts made by the soul to find relief outside of God, this is the most pitiable. (Compare note on line 93.)

**Nature's.**—As many a man before and after him, Thompson tried to find a fulness of rest and repose in nature. "Few seem to realize that she is alive, has almost as many ways as a woman, and is to be lived with, not merely looked at." Thus he writes to Mrs. Meynell (*Life*, p. 131). But he himself found that it was quite impossible that the void of the human heart should be filled by dumb nature. He will tell us this in lines 90-104, and speaks of it in "A Renegade Poet and Other Essays" (Boston, 1910, pp. 95-96): "You speak, and you think she answers you. It is the echo of your own voice. You think you hear the throbbing of her heart, and it is the throbbing of your own. I do not believe that Nature has a heart; and I suspect that like many another beauty, she has been credited with a heart because of her face." A companionship can be found in nature, if it be sought aright and restrainedly. So did St. Francis of Assissi find joy in Nature and Nature's children, because they and he were children of the same Father. So do not the Pantheists and atheistic nature-lovers.

**Line 62. Delicate.**—Notice the word which is repeated in line 74. The soul has lost faith in its fellows, and unaggressive nature with its verdant meadows, soft turf and gentle breezes seemed to hold the balm of Galaad that would heal its smarts nor would it ever bruise his soul. There seems interwoven with these lines the confession that Thompson found the fellowship of men a rasp to his sensitive, high-strung soul—men who called him "The dreamer," who said that he "hung his needless head" among them. Compare note on line 123.

*Line 66. Vagrant.*—Here used in its radical, active sense of “wandering,” “straying.” Compare line 14 and note.

Compare the passage from *Sister Poems* (Part 2nd, lines 34, 35, Burns and Oates Edition, 1908):

“Sees the palm and tamarind  
Tangle the tresses of a phantom wind.”

*Lines 68-69. Wind-Walled Palace.*—The winds are pictured as the walls of the palace, the earth being the floor.

*Lines 70-72.* The meaning seems to be, that in the early hours, before the turmoil of life taints the earth, Nature’s children drink of the dews which come pure and clean and sparkling (“*lucent-weeping*” = pouring forth light) out of the morning’s chalice.

Corot, the famous French painter, used to fold up his kit at sunrise and go into the house, saying that beauty vanished with the broad daylight.

*Line 75.* Though Nature is an open book, which God spreads before us all, still there are secrets that one can find out only by diligent search. As in any other book, it requires time and thought to “read between the lines.”

*Line 76.* Compare Wordsworth’s “Michael”:

“Hence he had learned the meaning of all winds,  
Of blasts of every tone; and oftentimes,  
When others heeded not, he heard the south  
Make subterraneous music, like the noise  
Of bagpipers on distant Highland hills.”

*Lines 78-79.* Compare Tennyson (*Ancient Sage*):

“This wealth of waters might but seem to draw  
From yon dark cave, but son, the source is higher,  
Yon summit half a league in air—and higher,



The cloud that hides it—higher still, the heavens  
Whereby the clouds are moulded, and whereout  
The cloud descended. Force is from the heights."

Note well that both Tennyson and Thompson are admirably accurate on matters scientific, even those technically so. These present lines express, as only a poet could, the bald fact that the water is drawn up from the ocean by the heat of the sun and forms clouds. Tennyson frames this briefly: "The clouds themselves are children of the sun." Besides comparing Shelly's "Cloud," notice "Clouds" by J. B. Tabb:

"Born of the waters are we,  
Clean of original stain;  
Fresh from the salt of the sea,  
Pure from the marsh and the plain.

Born of the breezes above,  
Whithersoever they go,  
Made in a mystical love,  
Mothers of Rain and of Snow."

*Line 79. Spumèd of the Wild Sea-Snortings.*—As though the white clouds were foam thrown off by great sea-horses in their wild racing.

*Line 82. Wailful or Divine.*—The outcome of every spiritual movement sent by God, is joy and peace; and even though in the beginning there be darkness, this is only the "shade of His hand outstretched caressingly."

Darkness there may be for the soul, even as night falls on the body, but both darknesses are meant for respite, not for irritation. Gloom from God is always the forerunner of dawn; it is the noon of night that will yield to the cheering twilight in which holy souls in this vale of tears abide until they stand in the full light of Heaven. Be the darkness what it may, unless

we misread its sending, there is nothing wailful about it, save for heroic souls who make love's complaint: "Yet more, O Lord, yet more." Where God is, there are no tears; or, if there be, they touch but the surface, as the rainfall and the storm ruffle the ocean's breast, while the depths of the soul are at peace with God. To every soul-cloud sent by God, there is a silver lining seen and felt. Darkness that brings lasting depression is not of God.

Notice the chiasitic construction:

Wailful		divine
joyed		bereaven.

To Thompson, as we know from his life, there seemed a very evident parallel between the seasons of the soul and the Church's liturgical seasons.

*Line 84.* All too well is it known that with those in grief and anxiety the lengthening shadows of eventide are wont to bring on depression and anxiety; then, when the morning comes, they "laugh in the morning's eyes," for the material light, breaking in on the darkness, all unconsciously causes light and joy to be re-lit in their hearts and drives back all shadows therefrom.

*Lines 85-86.* This is a beautiful image of the stars as glimmering tapers placed round the day that is dead and which by its brightness and glory was like to the holiness of grace. Compare Macbeth, Act. II, Scene 1:

"There's husbandry in heaven;  
Their candles are all out."

*Line 86. Dead Sanctities.*—To Thompson, even as to every true lover of God, everything in nature was "sacramental," that is, a sensible sign of some hidden, mysterious power behind. Compare Romans i, 20: "For the invisible things of Him, from the creation of the world, are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made." This too was the way of the

Saints, away and beyond all other men. To them, it was frankly true, "Turn but a stone and start an Angel's wing." The root difficulty in these modern days is that "Heaven is not as neighbourly with us as with men of old."

Compare the opening verses of "Orient Ode," wherein Thompson bases his imagery on the Catholic ritual of Benediction.

*Line 90.* In the revealed story of the creative days, we read after each day that preceded man's own coming: "And God saw that it was good." Philosophy, too, unless it be quite sapped of its truth by ancient or modern Manichæism, which would hold to a double principle of good and evil, teaches us that all things are good. So the rain is good, and it is sweet too—sweet to the lips of the parched earth, the long dusty road, the thirsting flowers, the cricket with its drought-born cry. Only in the tears of man is there bitterness, brought there by his own sad misconstruing of life and life's problem. God, by the gifts He had given to our first parents, dried our tears before they ever fell. Adam's sin unloosed the fountain of tears and swift and destructive has been the flowing since then, from the first cry of the new-born babe to the tears that wet age's cheeks, as it bends over its own grave. "Never morning wore to evening, but some heart did break" (In Memoriam, Canto vi). Compare A. O'Shaugnessy's Fountain of Tears.

We read the following in the "Autobiography of the Little Flower" (p. 100): "On that day, too, the sun dared not shine, and the beautiful blue sky of Italy, hidden by dark clouds, mingled its tears with mine."

*Line 91. Sunset Heart.*—All through this passage Nature is personified; and quite naturally the metaphor of heart is here introduced. Compare Thompson's "A Corymbus for Autumn":

"Day's dying dragon lies drooping his crest,  
Panting red pants into the West."

Again, the "Ode to the Setting Sun" may be read for much similar imagery.

Though dissimilar, the following from Sidney Lanier's "Evening Song" is worthy of note:

"Now in the sea's red vintage melts the sun,  
As Egypt's pearl dissolved in rosy wine,  
And Cleopatra night drinks all."

*Line 93.* How many gropers after God have tried to win warmth for their heart from nature and nature-study—futilely! The cult of nature in lieu of religion has been prominent of late, because in most religions there has been an adequate destruction of all true notions of the supernatural. Emotionalism is taken for religion; and we all know, that while nature's beauties can awaken powerful emotions in any soul that is not utterly crass, such fleeting phases of feeling are not satisfying food for an immortal soul. Naturism is a poor substitute. No, not by that, by that is eased our human smart!

*Line 94.* Even in the Garden of Eden, where there could be no "human smart," God saw that it was not good for man to be alone; and so made for him a helpmate like unto himself (Genesis ii, 18). But once the human heart knew pain and sorrow, this need of intelligent, actively sympathetic and, above all, competent comradeship became intensified. The Incarnation is the answer to that need. "And the Word was made flesh and dwelt amongst us" (St. John i, 14). Thus we have to keep us company, "the man, Christ Jesus" (1 Timothy ii, 5); as man, keenly and experimentally conscious of our weakness; as God, strong to ease our "human smarts." Read the striking passage in Hebrews ii, 9-18.

**By That, By That.**—There is deep pathos in this repetition. He had taken himself right gladly and most hopefully to these children of a mother whom he thought to own in common with them, and now the increased "human smart" assures him



that his kinship was mistaken; nay more, these children and he are alien and do not speak the same language. Their "delicate fellowship" was, after all, a deceptive thing.

So deep-seated is this need of human companionship in our nature, that Aristotle tells us in the *Politics* (Bk. I, ch. 2): "But he who is unable to live in society, or who has no need because he is sufficient in himself, must be either a beast or a god: he is no part of a state" (Jowett's Translation). The soul here is neither a beast, for the objects of its misdirected love are not sinful; nor is it a god, as its incessant craving for created love proves.

This part of the poem ought to be compared with these powerful passages in Holy Scripture in which the absurdity of idolatry is shown: *Wisdom* xii, 10-19, *Isaias* xlv, 9-20, *Jeremias* x, 3-5.

*Line 95.* Even when on cloudy, damp days nature seemed best attuned to his sorrow, it gave him no solace.

*Line 98. Their Sound is But Their Stir.*—The trees, the flowers, the grass, the water, etc., "speak" to us of God, not by the sound they make as they are swayed by the winds or tumble over the rocks, but by silently showing forth, as imitations and adumbrations, His limitless perfections. This "witnessing" is beautifully described by the Psalmist (*Psalm* xviii, 2-5):

"The heavens show forth the glory of God,  
And the firmament declareth the work of His hands.  
Day to day uttereth speech,  
And night to night showeth knowledge.  
There are no speeches or languages  
Where their voices are not heard.  
Their sound hath gone forth into all the earth,  
And their words unto the ends of the world."

It is of this eloquence of nature that the *Book of Wisdom* speaks (xiii, 1-9):

"But all men are vain, in whom there is not the knowledge of God: and who by these good things that are seen, could not understand Him that is, neither by attending to the works have acknowledged who was the workman: but have imagined either the fire, or the wind, or the swift air, or the circle of the stars, or the great water, or the sun and moon, to be the gods that rule the world. With whose beauty, if they, being delighted, took them to be gods, let them know how much the Lord of them is more beautiful than they: for the first author of beauty made all those things. Or if they admired their power and their effects, let them understand by them, that He that made them, is mightier than they: for by the greatness of the beauty and of the creature, the Creator of them may be seen, so as to be known thereby. But yet as to these they are less to be blamed. For they perhaps err, seeking God and desirous to find Him. For being conversant among His works, they search, and they are persuaded that the things are good which are seen. But then again they are not to be pardoned. For if they were able to know so much as to make a judgment of the world, how did they not more easily find out the Lord thereof?"

**Silences.**—These silences could never ease the troubled heart. There is only one silence that can heal every human smart; and that is the "silence of Death," that ushers us into eternity, wherein reverberate unceasingly "the soundless thunders of eternal bliss, breaking on an immaterial shore."

*Line 99.* Nature was not at fault. If she failed, it was because she was asked to nurture a child that was not of her kind nor of her own choosing.

*Line 100. Owe.*—Here in the sense of "own," "claim me as her own."

Despite the fact that he realizes she is not his mother, he makes one last despairing appeal.

*Line 101.* Nature does drop the blue bosom-veil of sky and, from the breasts of her tenderness, pour down upon her true but irrational children, the enlivening rain that furthers their growth.

*Line 103.* **Never . . . Once.**—This search has been utterly futile. At least man and maid and child began to return his love, until God, with cruel kindness, offset it.

*Line 105.* Compare the lines of Homer describing the pursuit of Hector by Achilles (*Iliad* xxii, 157-161): "Thereby they ran, he flying, he pursuing. Valiant was the flier, but far mightier he who fleetly pursued him. For not for beast of sacrifice or for an ox-hide were they striving, such as are prizes for men's speed of foot, but for the life of horse-training Hector was their race." So here the prize is the soul of man to be won wholly to God.

*Line 108.* **Noisèd.**—I. e., making noise.

*Line 110.* When we content God and have our heart set on Him above all, then the little joys and pleasures of earth content us, because we seek to draw from creatures only the meed of happiness they are meant to give and we use them aright, as "food for our journey and not as snares for our tarrying" (*viaticum itineris, non illecebra mansionis*). But when we content not God and have our hearts far from Him, then nought contents us, either because the foreseen brevity of the happiness, which created things will give, taints even the initial tasting, or because, blind to the limited pleasure-content of created things, we seek to gain from them what they are adequately powerless to give, and then find ourselves unsated. "God made man after His own image and likeness," wherefore He gave him an infinite capacity, and infinite desires, such as cannot be satisfied with any finite goods. Therefore it is necessary that God alone, who is infinite Good, should fill and satisfy that capacity.

*Lines 111-154*

In these lines we have the awakening of the soul progressively portrayed. In lines 111-129 the poet pictures his shattered life and the fading of his last hope to find comfort at least in his worded work, just as every shattered soul clutches with piteous futility at some pet nothingness on which to try to stay its beaten love. Then in lines 130-154 the truth begins to be realized that love for God must stand alone in the soul and that it grows and flourishes therein only when the soul has been "dunged with rotten death" and by its dead hopes rendered fertile to give God unstinted love.

*Line 111.* With the prophet Jeremias (xlvii, 6) the soul cries out: "O thou sword of God, how long wilt thou not be quiet? Go into thy scabbard, rest, and be still." Still and motionless this sword will be, if only the soul itself will allow it to remain so. If it has now learned the lesson that God will have it learn—that of whole-hearted submission to His Will—then it is wrong in awaiting an uplifted stroke, unless indeed it prove itself as stiff-necked in its rebellion as were the Jews to whom Isaias prophesied (ix, 11-13): "The Lord . . . shall bring on his enemies in a crowd: the Syrians from the east and the Philistines from the west and they shall devour Israel with open mouth. For all this His indignation is not turned away, but His hand is stretched out still. And the people are not returned to Him who hath struck them and have not sought after the Lord of Hosts." If the soul will return to Him who hath struck it, then it will hear the Psalmist singing, "A contrite and humbled heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise" (Psalm 1, 19). It would seem that Thompson portrays the soul as just beginning to realize that it was really God's love for it that brought all this disappointment. Love's "No" must often cost a deal of pain and it is often wisely cruel for love to say it. Compare Hebrews xii, 5-8:



“My son, neglect not the discipline of the Lord;  
Neither be thou wearied whilst thou art rebuked by  
Him.  
For whom the Lord loveth, He chastiseth;  
And He scourgeth every son whom He receiveth.

Persevere under discipline. God dealeth with you as with His sons; for what son is there, whom the father doth not correct? But if you be without chastisement, whereof all are made partakers, then are you bastards, and not sons.”

*Line 112.* Bit by bit, the love of all earthly things by which he has been trying to encase himself against God's love has been “hewn” away. Lusty strokes were needed, for they fitted so tightly and so snugly, and were grasped so wilfully. Compare the verses from “Cælestis Urbs Jerusalem,” the Breviary hymn for the Dedication of a Church (Translation by Rev. T. J. Campbell, S. J.):

“Thy gates of purest pearl are opened wide  
To all the world; for, by no previous worth,  
Are mortals led to thee; but Christ who for them died,  
Hath wrought within their souls a supernatural birth  
That makes them bear the frequent mallet's blow,  
And the slow shaping which the chisel gives,  
By which each stone is fitted to the rest and lives,  
That so beyond the stars the Church of God may grow.”

*Line 113.* Metaphor from the old wars of lances. Compare Æschylus (Agamemnon, lines 60-68; Morshead's Translation):

“Even so doth Zeus the jealous lord  
And guardian of the hearth and board,  
Speed Atreus' sons, in vengeful ire,  
'Gainst Paris—sends them forth on fire,

Her to buy back, in war and blood,  
 Whom one did wed but many woo'd!  
 And many, many, by his will,  
 The last embrace of foes shall feel,  
 And many a knee in dust be bowed,  
 And splintered spears on shields ring loud,  
 Of Trojan and of Greek, before  
 That iron bridal-feast be o'er!"

*Line 115.* Does Thompson mean to tell us that during the whole time of his flight from God his soul had been really asleep, not alive to what was real around it and to what concerned it most? Or does he mean that, after all had been stripped from it, he lapsed for a while into a dazed condition like unto sleep and, on awakening, first realized the stark reality of his witless wanderings? Judging from his whole character, the first view seems correct. Compare Job xvi, 12-15:

"I that was formerly so wealthy, am all on a sudden broken to pieces;  
 He hath taken me by my neck, He hath broken me,  
 And hath set me up to be His mark.  
 He hath compassed me round about with His lances,  
 He hath wounded my loins;  
 He hath not spared, and hath poured out my bowels on the earth.  
 He hath torn me with wound upon wound,  
 He hath rushed in upon me like a giant."

*Line 116. Slowly Gazing.*—So true to life, when one is wakened from deep sleep after harrowing experiences.

*Lines 117-123.* Note and weigh each word in this composite picture of life-wreckage and compare with it the Psalmist's song (Psalm i, 1-4):

"Happy is the man who hath not walked in the counsel of the  
ungodly,

But his will is in the law of the Lord,

And on His law he shall meditate day and night.

And he shall be like a tree which is planted near the running  
waters,

Which shall bring forth its fruit in due season.

And his leaf shall not fall off:

And all whatsoever he shall do, shall prosper.

Not so the wicked, not so:

But like the dust which the wind driveth from the face of the  
earth."

and again, Psalm cxxvii, 1-4:

"Blessed are all they that fear the Lord:

That walk in his ways.

Thou shalt eat the labors of thy hands:

Blessed art thou and it shall be well with thee.

Thy wife as a fruitful vine,

On the sides of thy house.

Thy children as olive plants,

Round about thy table.

Behold, thus shall the man be blessed

That feareth the Lord."

*Lines 117-121.* The poet here pictures life as a dwelling supported by the "pillaring hours" of youth, which in his rashness and folly he pulls down upon him, to find himself, all besmirched and bedraggled, standing amid the ruins, with youth done for and dead beneath.

These lines vividly recall the story of Samson (Judges xvi, 25-30): "And rejoicing in their feasts, when they had now taken their good cheer, they commanded that Samson should

be called, and should play before them. And being brought out of prison he played before them, and they made him stand between two pillars. And he said to the lad that guided his steps, 'Suffer me to touch the pillars which support the whole house, and let me lean upon them, and rest a little.' Now the house was full of men and women, and all the princes of the Philistines were there. Moreover about three thousand persons of both sexes from the roof and the higher part of the house were beholding Samson's play. But he called upon the Lord, saying, 'O Lord God remember me and restore to me now my former strength, O my God, that I may revenge myself on my enemies, and for the loss of my two eyes I may take one revenge.' And laying hold on both the pillars on which the house rested, and holding the one with his right hand and the other with his left, he said, 'Let me die with the Philistines.' And when he had strongly shook the pillars, the house fell upon all the princes and the rest of the multitude that was there: and he killed many more at his death, than he had killed before in his life."

It is a searing, and therefore great grace from God to be made to realize the blight that has lain on our past years; for then as we kneel in prayer we can humbly cry: "I shall recount to Thee all my years in the bitterness of my soul. O Lord, if man's life be such, and the life of my spirit be in such things as these, Thou shalt correct me and make me to live" (Isaias xxxviii, 15, 16). Then shall the answer ever come back to us: "As it was your mind to go astray from God, so when you return again, you shall seek Him ten times as much" (Baruch iv, 28).

*Line 117. Rash Lustihood of my Young Powers.*—Youth is strong, yet wasteful of its new-won strength and it is usually only the weight of years that brings a proper poise to every act. Many, many men must cry out with sorrowing David (Psalm xxiv, 6, 7):



“Remember, O Lord, Thy bowels of compassion,  
And thy mercies that are from the beginning of the world.  
The sins of my youth and my ignorance do not remember.  
According to Thy mercy remember Thou me;  
For Thy goodness’ sake, O Lord.”

*Line 118. Pillaring Hours.*—The time of youth is the time of “pillaring hours,” i. e., it is then that man must build for the future by means of the proper moulding and the right education of his “young powers” of mind and body, that they may be the “pillars” or supports of his maturer life.

*Line 119. Pulled My Life Upon Me.*—Does Thompson here have in mind the years of his want in London, when he actually did pull his life upon him and quite ruined his body by the use of drugs?

*Grimed with Smears.*—i. e., soiled by all that he had done amiss.

*Line 120.* Carrying out the metaphor of “pillaring hours” and “pulled my life upon me,” after the crash of falling walls, he finds himself standing amid the dust of the years heaped up into a mound of debris. Wreckage is all that is left, where a perfect dwelling ought to have been. It was while gazing back at death’s door over the tangled wreckage of his lawless days, that the penitent thief found it in his heart to cry out: “Lord, remember me, when Thou shalt come into Thy kingdom” (St. Luke xxiii, 42). That cry meant much humility; and such must we all have, when the failure of years, seeming or real, faces us, else no man can tell the sad future of our souls.

*Line 121. Mangled.*—By his own willful self-seeking, thus spoiling the handiwork of God.

*Line 122. Crackled.*—Where there should have been the freshness of youth, there was nothing but the dryness of age, fit fuel for the flames.

Compare W. H. Mallock ("The Old Order Changeth," Vol. I, pp. 135-136, Bentley & Son, London, 1886):

"Oh World! whose days like sunlit waters glide,  
Whose music links the midnight with the morrow,  
Who for thy own hast Beauty, Power and Pride,—  
Oh, World what art thou? And the world replied:  
'A husk of pleasure round a heart of sorrow.'

Oh, Child of God! thou who hast sought thy way  
Where all this music sounds, this sunlight gleams,  
Mid Pride and Power and Beauty day by day—  
And what art thou? I heard my own soul say:  
'A wandering sorrow in a world of dreams.'"

Compare Psalm ci, 4-5, 12:

"For my days are vanished like smoke,  
And my bones are grown dry like fuel for the fire.  
I am smitten as grass, and my heart is withered:  
Because I forgot to eat my bread.

My days have declined like a shadow,  
And I am withered like grass."

Indeed the misplaced efforts of his younger days have passed away, leaving no lasting good behind, even as smoke leaves no least trace of its passing.

We recall the wonderful picture of life given us in Wisdom v, 9-14: "All those things are passed away like a shadow, and like a post that runneth on, and as a ship that passeth through the waves, whereof when it is gone by, the trace cannot be found, nor the path of its keel in the waters; or as when a bird flieth through the air, of the passage of which no mark can be found, but only the sound of the wings beating the light air, and parting it by the force of her flight; she moved her wings and hath flown through, and there is no mark found afterwards of

her way: or as when an arrow is shot at a mark, the divided air cometh together again, so that the passage thereof is not known: so we also being born, forthwith ceased to be, and have been able to show no mark of virtue, but are consumed in our wickedness. Such things as these the sinners said in hell." Compare also Isaias xxxviii, 12: "My generation is at an end, and it is rolled away from me, as a shepherd's tent. My life is cut off as by a weaver: whilst I was yet beginning, he cut me off."

*Line 123.* Compare the following lines from Thompson (*The Poppy*):

"I hang 'mid men my needless head  
And my fruit is dreams, as theirs is bread:  
The goodly men and the sun-hazed sleeper  
Time shall reap, but after the reaper  
The world shall glean of me, me the sleeper!

. . . . .  
Love! I fall into the claws of Time:  
But lasts within a leavèd rhyme  
All that the world of me esteems—  
My withered dreams, my withered dreams!

Thompson's disappointment, and he was sadly disappointed at the lack of appreciation shown him by the world, is poignantly described by him in "*The Cloud's Swan-Song*":

"A lonely man, oppressed with lonely ills,  
And all the glory fallen from my song,  
Here do I walk among the windy hills;  
The wind and I keep both one monotoning tongue.

Like grey clouds one by one my songs upsoar  
Over my soul's cold peaks; and one by one  
They loose their little rain, and are no more;  
And whether well or ill, to tell me there is none.

For 'tis an alien tongue, of alien things,  
 From all men's care, how miserably apart!  
 Even my friends say: 'Of what is this he sings?'  
 And barren is my song and barren is my heart."

*Line 125.* All the more substantial objects of love and of consolatory powers had failed him. Now things most easily had, the dream of the dreamer, the music of the lutanist, the musings of the poet that are wont to bring a stray ray of sunshine into dark hours, none of these offer relief.

Compare the beautiful passages from the Apocalypse xviii, 22, 23: "And the voice of harpers and of musicians, and of them that play on the pipe and on the trumpet, shall no more be heard at all in thee; and no craftsman of any art whatsoever shall be found anymore at all in thee; and the sound of the mill shall be heard no more at all in thee; and the light of the lamp shall shine no more at all in thee; and the voice of the bridegroom and the bride shall be heard no more at all in thee." Again Jeremias vii, 34: "And I will cause to cease out of the cities of Juda and out of the streets of Jerusalem, the voice of joy and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride: for the land shall be desolate"; and Ezechiel xxvi, 13: "And I will make the multitude of thy songs to cease and the sound of thy harps shall be no more."

Thus St. John spoke of Babylon and Jeremias of Jerusalem and Ezechiel of Tyre; and thus it is told of every heart that makes itself a mart where the things of time may come and go, but where God alone is not most welcome. If a man would have peace of soul, he must heed the caution of the poet, Archbishop Trench:

"But keep thou thine a holy solitude;  
 For He, who would walk there, would walk alone;  
 He who would drink there, must be first endued  
 With single right to call that stream His own."



Keep thou thine heart close-fastened, unrevealed,  
A fenced garden and a fountain sealed."

*Lines 126-129.* Like many another poet, he wove sweet sounding cadences of words around the world and all its trinkets, and toyed with it as would a child, and it gave him joy for the while and eased his heart a bit; but now, when that earth is loaded with heavy griefs, the fragile cords can bear no such strain.

*Line 129. Overplussed.*—i. e., overcharged, overloaded.

*Lines 130-132. Weed.*—The notion of weed is here shorn of all its unpleasant connotation of worthlessness and is used because of its prolificness, that makes all other growth impossible. (This metaphor, like the title of the poem, is a good example of Thompson's felicitous boldness.)

**Amaranthine.**—An adjective derived from the Greek word meaning "deathless." We read in St. Peter (1 Peter v, 4): "And when the prince of pastors shall appear, you shall receive a never-fading (literally in the Greek 'amaranthine') crown."

*Line 132.* From the very start (lines 19-27) the soul perceived (though its practical application of its perception was distorted) that God was to be its "all of love." Now, this realization is intensified. Father A. J. Ryan (Nocturne) with wonted simplicity, sings:

"Nay! list to the voice of the Heavens,  
'One Eternal alone reigns above.'  
Is it true? and all else are but idols,  
So the heart can have only one love?

Only one, all the rest are but idols,  
That fall from their shrines soon or late,  
When the Love that is Lord of the temple,  
Comes with sceptre and crown to the gate."

*Line 133.* The soul begins to see dimly something of God's designs but unlike St. Paul, unhorsed on the road to Damascus, it yields no ready submission. The reason of St. Paul's instantaneous yielding was that he really had been seeking God and His glory according to his conscience. Here the soul is seeking self, not hearkening to the words of Our Lord: "If any man come to Me and hate not his father and mother and wife and children and brethren and sisters, yea and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple" (St. Luke xiv, 26). "If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me" (St. Matthew xvi, 24). This self-denial is the forfeit of sanctity, the price of being near God.

*Line 134. Designer Infinite.*—One of the strongest arguments for the existence of God is "the argument from design." The myriad multiplicity of interacting agents both on this tiny earth of ours and especially in the great unmeasured reaches of the heavens speak loudly of a Designer, all-wise in His conceptions and infinite in His power to make such conceptions materialize. "The harmony of the spheres," the co-ordination and sub-ordination of nature's laws, and the often palpably felt directive force in man's own soul-life tell intelligibly that "Behind the dim unknown, standeth God within the shadow, keeping watch above His own." (N. B. "The archetypal ideas of God," which served Him as exemplars of creation, is a familiar expression to all conversant with even the rudiments of Scholastic Philosophy.)

*Line 135.* Metaphor from charcoal sketching, wherein the wood is burned and charred before being fit for use.

The more experience one has of life, the more one is convinced that pain and suffering is a tremendous grace from God. "Behold, I have refined thee, but not with silver; I have chosen thee in the furnace of poverty" (Isaias xlviii, 10). It is only from hearts that are bruised, that the "sweet odor of Christ" will come forth. "Thy own soul a sword shall pierce, that

out of many hearts thoughts may be revealed" (St. Luke ii, 35). Compare notes on lines 111, 133, 143.

Whether we will or no, the cross awaits us everywhere in life. As Kempis says: "The cross, therefore, is always ready, and everywhere waits for thee. Thou canst not escape it whithersoever thou runnest; for whithersoever thou goest, thou carriest thyself with thee, and shalt always find thyself. Turn thyself upwards, or turn thyself downwards; turn thyself without or turn thyself within thee, and everywhere thou will find the cross. . . . If thou fling away one cross, without doubt thou will find another, and perhaps a heavier" (Imitation of Christ, Book II, ch. 12). Is it not then plain common sense to follow this saintly author's advice: "Set thyself, then, like a good and faithful servant of Christ to bear manfully the cross of thy Lord, for the love of Him who was crucified for thee. . . . For He manifestly exhorts both His disciples that followed Him and all that desire to follow Him to bear the cross, saying: "If anyone will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me"? So too, St. Paul exhorts Timothy (2 Timothy ii, 3): "Take your share of trials as a good soldier of Jesus Christ."

*Lines 136-140.* There is a wonted Thompsonian profuseness of metaphor here, but no confusion.

*Line 136. Spent Its Wavering Shower in the Dust.*—Hence uselessly; for the fitful shower merely moistens the dust and does not sink into and fructify the earth.

**My Freshness.**—My youth, the time of freshness and energy.

**Its Wavering Shower.**—The efforts of youth are wont to be spasmodic and unstable. "A boy's will is the wind's will."

Energy was spent in youth without thought of the time of maturer but weaker years. Many a man who has set his heart unduly on created things and won them not, cries out, as did the Apostles (St. Luke v, 5): "Master, we have labored all

the night and have taken nothing." Yet it is a tremendous grace to realize this before death; for, though it be hard to go to the grave, empty-handed of earthly riches, it is eternally bad to go there poor in the things of God. Compare note on line 123, second quotation, lines 5-8.

G. K. Chesterton tells us sententiously that "Hell is energy without joy"; and he sums up much theology in those few words.

*Lines 137-140.* This whole metaphor is taken from a broken, discarded well over which hangs a gaunt, stark tree from whose soughing branches the bleak wind spills down into the stagnant waters below the drops of rain which seem to ooze out of the branches. Every single word should be weighed in this picture of personal desolation which appeals to many as one of the most powerful that has come from human pen. The wealth and force of its imagery recalls the description of place-desolation in *Isaias xxxiv, 8-15*: "For it is the day of vengeance of the Lord, the year of recompenses of the judgment of Sion. And the streams thereof (i. e., of the land of the enemies) shall be turned into pitch, and the ground thereof into brimstone, and the land thereof shall become burning pitch. Night and day it shall not be quenched, the smoke thereof shall go up forever; from generation to generation it shall lie waste, none shall pass through it forever and ever. The bittern and the ericius shall possess it; the ibis and the raven shall dwell in it; and a line shall be stretched out upon it, to bring it to nothing, and a plummet, unto desolation. The nobles thereof shall not be there; they shall call rather upon the king, and all the princes thereof shall be nothing. And thorns and nettles shall grow up in its houses, and the thistle in the fortresses thereof; and it shall be the habitation of dragons, and the pasture of ostriches. And demons and monsters shall meet, and the hairy ones shall cry one to another; there hath the lamia lain down, and found rest for herself. There hath the ericius had its hole, and brought



up its young ones, and hath dug round about, and cherished them in the shadow thereof; thither are the kites gathered together, one to another."

*Line 137. Broken Fount.*—Once it was a fountain fair to see, holding pure waters of love; but now it is a broken, discarded thing; and all that were given leave to draw love therefrom, have left it in dreary isolation; and all that were to be to it the sources of its springs of love have sent no waters therein.

*Line 138. Tear-Drippings.*—No flood of tears such as assuage lesser griefs but just those dreadful tears that are distilled one by one from the mind in deepest desolation and depression.

*Lines 139-140. Dank Thoughts, Sighful Branches.*—The poor mind distills "dank" (i. e., gloomy, oppressive) thoughts from its "sighful" branches, and these fall into a heart that has lost all motion, suffering that dreadful paralysis that comes from excessive sorrow. We cannot but think of Our Lord in the Agony as described in the Greek New Testament. It is said that he began *λυπείσθαι* (St. Matthew xxvi, 37), to be sad; then *ἀδημονεῖν* (St. Matthew *ibid.*), to be heavy and dazed; lastly *ἐκθαμβεῖσθαι* (St. Mark xiv, 33), to be aghast and terrified. There is a distinct progress in mental effects as He allows the Passion and its terrors to grow upon Him.

N. B. We need not press the word "branches" to find a strict parallel in the mind. It merely fills out the picture, indicating that there was no quarter of the mind that offered anything but sadness and depression.

*Line 142. The Pulp so Bitter.*—If in the days of youth and new-born manhood, when life is wont to be so sweet and every day is as a day in June, I find all so tasteless, nay bitter, how will my old age be? The soul has not yet learned the worth of the Psalmist's prayer: "Cast me not off in the time of old-age: when my strength shall fail, do not Thou forsake me" (Psalm lxx, 9); nor does it realize that God can and does make old age

for those who have always loved him—yes, and even for those who learned late to love Him—a time of gentle, peaceful waiting for the Bridegroom's coming. The last few hours of even the penitent thief were such.

We might recall St. Luke (xxiii, 31): "For if in the green wood they do these things, what shall be done in the dry?"

The soul is now absolutely disconsolate, for all objects of love have been taken from it.

"The night has a thousand eyes,  
And the day but one;  
Yet the light of the bright world dies  
With the dying sun.

The mind has a thousand eyes,  
And the heart but one;  
Yet the light of a whole life dies  
When love is done."

Life seems utterly blanked now, and there seems to lie athwart life's path a future darker than the shadowed past.

*Line 143.* Under the repeated dosages of disappointment, sorrow and misfortune, the soul's vision is being cleared, even as the blind man's eyes were given light through the anointing with clay and spittle (St. John ix, 6).

It begins to see the healing and sanctifying value of all that the human heart holds hard, it begins to realize the old sayings, "per aspera, ad astra," "per crucem ad lucem." The Greeks, too, had the proverb: *ἐὰν ἔπαθες, ἔμαθες* (if you suffer, you learn). Virgil makes Dido say (*Æneid* Bk. I, line 630): "Non ignara mali miseris succurrere disco" ("Nor yet untaught in sorrow's school, I learn to succor grieving hearts"). Isaias tell us (xxviii, 19): "Vexation alone shall make you understand what you hear." And with unmistakable terms Christ Our Lord says: "Amen, amen, I say to you, unless the grain of wheat,

falling into the ground, die, itself remaineth alone. But if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit" (St. John xii, 24, 25).

God very kindly keeps the hidden freight of the future away from our eyes; yet, from time to time, as we absorb experiences, it becomes clearer and clearer to us that the way of progress in this vale of tears is the way of the cross. God indeed has a surgery for the soul more healing than ever was or can be the surgery of the body—yes, and far more necessary. Fr. Ryan sings (A Thought):

"It is a truth beyond our ken—  
And yet a truth that all may read—  
It is with roses as with men,  
The sweetest hearts are those that bleed.

The flower that Bethlehem saw bloom  
Out of a heart all full of grace,  
Gave never forth its full perfume  
Until the cross became its vase."

The old dramatist Æschylus (Agamemnon), lines 176-178 (Morsehead's Translation) tells us:

"'Tis Zeus alone who shows the perfect way  
Of knowledge: He hath ruled,  
Men shall learn wisdom, by affliction schooled."

Joyce Kilmer (Poets) sings so beautifully:

"Light songs we breathe that perish with our breath  
Out of our lips that have not kissed the rod.  
They shall not live who have not tasted death.  
They only sing who are struck dumb by God."

Compare notes on lines 111, 133, 135.

*Line 145.* To second the convictions that are beginning to take form in his mind, a vision is given him from Eternity;

and "Eternity" being the view-point, truth is necessarily implied. Notice how fitly the whole scene is described: "battlements of Eternity"—for he has been fighting against what is of God and now the unshakable walls are seen; the "mists" in which Time confounds everything because of our shortened purview are "shaken" for a short "space" by the magic trumpet. The soul catches a faint, dim, yet convincing view both of the turrets and of the summoner, and then the mists slowly fold all out of sight again.

*Lines 148-154.* Different interpretations have been given to these lines:

i. *Lines 148-151* picture Death. *Lines 152-154* is an address to God. The adjectives "gloomy," "purpureal," "cypress-crowned" are claimed to be more appropriate if Death be meant, but somewhat difficult of explanation if God be intended. Nor is the transition too abrupt, as the recognition of Death in line 150 makes the soul reflect and turn to God with a very natural question. Lastly the personal pronouns in lines 148-151 are spelled without capitals, which Thompson invariably uses when referring to God.

ii. The lines represent God throughout. Our Lord is pictured in "glooming robes purpureal": for He trod the winepress of Golgotha, coming "from Edom, with dyed garments from Bosra, the beautiful one in His robe" (Isaias lxiii, 1), and He is "cypress-crowned," for His crown, with which He was crowned conqueror of the world, was the crown of death. Compare "laurel-crowned" for crowned with victory.

*Lines 152-154.* Within the answer to this question would be contained the whole doctrine of mortification, so grossly misunderstood by many. Mortification is not a fetish but a ministering angel and, as the soul's spiritual vision is clarified, it sees, that mortification, i. e., the making dead (Latin *mortuum* and *facere*), the killing of all that is disordered in our lives is necessary, for three reasons:



i. That we may never be led astray by our passions. Right Psychology teaches us that sense-perceptions precede intellectual and volitional movements; and, if they are very vehement, are prone to hurry the latter into action without proper regard for the laws of God. To have perfectly under our control at all times and in all places all of our sense-activities, a deal of self-denial, i. e., mortification, is required. If we have not this control we are the playthings of our own passions and passing moods, and from our own hearts is wrung, sooner or later, the bitter cry of the old poet:

“I know my soul hath power to know all things,  
Yet is she blind and ignorant in all.  
I know I’m one of nature’s little kings,  
Yet to the least and vilest things am thrall.  
I know my life’s a pain and but a span,  
I know my sense is mocked in everything,  
And to conclude I know myself a man,  
Which is a proud and yet a wretched thing.”

Thompson had quite a singular grasp of the doctrine of mortification and the necessity of denying one’s self. He puts it tersely in “Any Saint”:

“Compost of Heaven and mire,  
Slow foot and swift desire!  
Lo,  
To have yes, choose no;  
  
Gird and thou shalt unbind;  
Seek not and thou shalt find;  
To eat  
Deny thy meat;  
  
And thou shalt be fulfilled  
With all sweet things unwilling.”



Recall Tennyson (In Memoriam):

“That men may rise on stepping-stones  
Of their dead selves to higher things.”

ii. That we may make atonement for past misuse of these same faculties, when by them we violated God's law, even in little things.

iii. That we may not be “delicate soldiers of a thorn-crowned King,” for “love either finds or makes alike”; and so “Those, who seriously follow Christ our Lord, love and earnestly desire . . . to be clothed with the same garment and with the livery of their Lord for His love and reverence” (St. Ignatius of Loyola). It was an over-mastering love of Christ that made so many Saints practice unwonted mortifications and could find them ever saying with the poet-priest of the South:

“I tasted all the sweets of sacrifice,  
I kissed my cross a thousand times a day,  
I hung and bled upon it in my dreams,  
I lived on it—I loved it to the last.”

It was such desire as this, to be like her suffering Lord, that made a St. Theresa plead, “Lord, let me suffer or let me die.”

**Man's Heart or Life.**—Man's heart is “dunged with rotten death” when it feels upon it the weight of the drooping and dead objects of its earthly love; and man's life yields God most harvest then only, when it has passed through ordeals that bring it well within the shadow of the Cross.

*Line 154.* Robert Southwell, S. J., in his “St. Peter's Complaint” has a quaint line:

“Did Christ manure thy heart to breed him briers?”

*Lines 155-176*

At length the fleeing soul is overtaken and with words that humble yet encourage, strike to the ground and yet uplift, it is told its real value and whom alone it can find to give such a worthless thing abiding love. New hope, too, is lighted up within when it is known that all its faded dreams will be found quite fulfilled "at home."

*Line 156. Comes on at Hand the Bruit.*—Note how subtly the poet conveys the idea of lessening distance between giant Pursuer and pursued. It is only now that the sound of the "following Feet" is near enough to be heard, and they are the feet of a "tremendous Lover"; and so the giant's footfall is indeed a bruit or great noise.

*Line 157.* As the sea when it bursts beneath the lashing of a vast storm seems to be roaring above and below and around those in the storm-tossed bark, thus the voice of God now so surrounds the soul that there is no avenue of escape. We hear in this line the refrain of the Psalmist (Psalm xli, 8-9, translation by J. M'Swiney, S. J.):

"Deep to deep is calling, at the noise of Thy cataracts;  
All Thy breakers and Thy waves are gone over me."

and again (Psalm xcii, 3, 4):

"The floods have lifted up, O Lord,  
The floods have lifted up their voice:  
The floods have lifted up their waves,  
With the noise of many waters.  
Wonderful are the surges of the sea:  
Wonderful is the Lord on high."

Thompson must surely have had in mind the words of St. John (Apocalypse i, 15): "And His voice as the sound of many waters."

*Line 158.* Note the progressive reproof in the words of God. First, a gentle correction which, however, brings hope (156-160); then by degrees, with a tenderness known only to pierced Hands, He lays bare the wounds of the soul and shows with healing pitilessness the utter unworthiness of the soul (161-170). This indeed must be realized, if we are to be saved from our own follies. Then, again, a correction of wrong impressions awakening old hopes (171-175). Finally the loving invitation to let bygones be bygones and to come to Him (176).

*Line 159.* Compare *Isaias xxx, 14*: "And it shall be broken small, as the potter's vessel is broken all to pieces with mighty breaking, and there shall not a shard be found of the pieces thereof, whereon a little fire may be carried from the hearth, or a little water be drawn out of the pit."

*Line 161.* A powerful line with a weight of adjectives that sink into the very heart of man.

**Strange.**—Weirdly-strange heart of man, who is the child of God, yet runs away lest it have no love except that of a Father who so loves it, that He gave His only Son as ransom for its sins and cried out to it: "Can a woman forget her infant, so as not to have pity on the son of her womb? And if she should forget, yet will I not forget thee. Behold I have graven thee in My hands" (*Isaias xlix, 15, 16*).

**Piteous.**—Worthy of all pity, because its running away is a foolish bit of childish insubordination, all to its own hurt. "Be astounded, O ye heavens, at this, and ye gates thereof be very desolate, saith the Lord. For My people have done two evils. They have forsaken Me, the fountain of living water, and have digged to themselves cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water" (*Jeremias ii, 12, 13*).

**Futile.** Because, if God is determined to win thy love, "it is hard for thee to kick against the goad" (*Acts ix, 5*). It is a rebellion doomed from the start.

*Line 164.* There is only one human love which stands not on



human meriting and that is the love of parent for child. This love is based and natively modeled on our heavenly Father's love. All other loves, the love of man and woman, of friend and friend is given precisely because of human excellence and human meriting. Supernatural love, however, being founded on the goodness of God and the eternal worth of every soul, heaven-destined like ourselves, sinful though it may now be, reaches beyond and above all this, remaining true when even the love of parent fails. Compare St. Matthew, v, 43-48.

*Lines 165-168.* Any man who realizes intimately that these lines are true of him, can kneel and cry out aright with the Psalmist: "Out of the depths I have cried to Thee, O Lord" (Psalm cxxix, 1). A vivid realization of this humiliating truth makes Saints, men and women to whom self is nought. This is the unraveler of the mystery of self-hatred, so present in the lives of the Saints. At least a lesser realization is necessary to every man who has at heart the salvation of his soul. For, as in the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth out of nothingness, so in the spiritual life, God will not build and form and fashion save where there is the nothingness of self-esteem.

*Line 166. Clotted.*—No longer is man the untainted, uncursed clay, into which God breathed the breath of life; for entangling passions have made him a sorry thing. The seven primal sources of sin have woven his life, individual and social, into many a knotted skein. The intellect, imbued with prejudices, leads the will astray; the will, plunging headlong after sensible delights, darkens the intellect; and against the control of both intellect and will, rise the rebellious senses. Truly if peace be "the tranquillity of order," there rarely is full peace found in man this side of the grave.

*Clay.*—As Ash Wednesday's "Remember man that thou art dust and unto dust thou shalt return," so this line, with one majestic sweep, carries us back to man's lowliest beginning.

Compare Thompson's similar expressions found in "Any Saint":

"Great arm-fellow of God!  
To the ancestral clod  
Kin  
And to cherubin;

Bread predilectedly  
O' the worm and Deity!  
Hark,  
O God's clay-sealed Ark."

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"Compost of Heaven and mire"

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"Rise; for Heaven hath no frown  
When thou to thee pluck'st down,  
Strong clod!  
The neck of God."

**Dingiest Clot.**—Every soul can say this, for even though its actual sins have not been as heinous as those of others, still its slack correspondence with God's graces, especially when these have come with unwonted largess into its life, makes it say in all truth, that it is the most ungrateful of mortals, the sorriest specimen of all.

*Lines 167-168.* Indeed, to know how little worthy we are of love, we should have to know what sin is. Yet this no man can know in its entirety; for to evaluate sin exactly, man would have to possess complete knowledge of God whom sin offends.

*Line 169. Ignoble.*—Surely man is ignoble:

i. In his primeval origin.—"And the Lord God formed man of the slime of the earth" (Genesis ii, 7).

ii. In his present nature.—"I find then a law, that when I

have a will to do good, evil is present within me. For I am delighted with the law of God according to the inward man: but I see another law in my members, fighting against the law of my mind, and captivating me in the law of sin, that is in my members. Unhappy man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" (Romans vii, 21-24).

iii. By the ending of his body.—"I have said to rottenness: Thou art my father; To worms: My mother and my sister" (Job. xviii, 14).

iv. By his ingratitude to God.—Most say "Thank you" to God far fewer times than they would in decency dare say it to a human benefactor. "Were not ten made clean? Where are the nine?" (St. Luke xvii, 17).

v. Above all in his sin.—"Yet I planted thee a chosen vineyard, all true seed: how then art thou turned unto Me into that which is good for nothing, O strange vineyard?" (Jeremias ii, 21).

In times of self-forgetfulness we seem to ourselves to be worth a deal and we preen our feathers and strut before the world; but when we sit alone and thoughtfully ponder the lapsed years, what is the autobiography we see written with incessant pen? "I will recount to thee all my years in the bitterness of my soul" (Isaias xxxviii, 15). When we finish the count, are we anxious to find a publisher for our autobiography; and were it published, would any of its readers ever find it in them to love us? Yet we crave to talk out our hearts. It was to meet this deep psychological craving that Our Lord deigned to institute the confessional, wherein we can lay bare our inmost souls and know that our secret will never be told, and ourselves never valued the less for the telling of our own sad tale.

*Line 170.* The soul must be made to realize that "to Thee is the poor man left: Thou wilt be a helper to the orphan" (Psalm ix, 14). Indeed it is only God who will accept the gift of a shattered life, and welcome a public Magdalen and promise

heaven to a dying thief. Truly "Thou art my God, for Thou hast no need of my goods" (Psalm xv, 2), "for Thou lovest all things that are, and hatest none of the things which Thou hast made: for Thou didst not appoint or make anything, hating it. . . . But Thou sparest all, because they are Thine, O Lord, who lovest souls" (Wisdom xi, 25, 27).

*Lines 171-176.* Note the exquisite touch in these lines. We are led to recall the action of a fond mother who takes away the playthings of her child, just that she may have the pleasure of having it seek them from her again.

Compare the following from Joyce Kilmer (Pennies):

"So unto men  
Doth God, depriving that He may bestow.  
Fame, health and money go,  
But that they may, new found, be newly sweet.  
Yea, at His feet  
Sit, waiting us, to their concealment bid,  
All they, our lovers, whom His love hath hid."

**All—Stored—Home.**—The words are well chosen to insinuate the length of the pursuit and the multiplicity of the objects taken. Note again the ringing pathos of the lines.

The soul must realize the reason of God's action which has seemed to it to be a baneful persecution. There are few words that insinuate so well the purpose God has in afflicting a soul as the words of Isaias (i, 5): "For what shall I strike you any more, you that increase transgressions?" God is a divine surgeon who cuts to heal. When the cutting serves but to increase the malady, He desists.

Compare Joel ii, 25, 26: "And I will restore to you the years which the locust, and the bruchus, and the mildew, and the palmerworm have eaten . . . and you shall eat in plenty and shall be filled: and you shall praise the name of the Lord your God, who hath done wonders with you, and My people



shall not be confounded forever." Also the following from Psalm lxxxviii, 31-34:

"And if his children forsake My law,  
And walk not in My judgments;  
If they profane My justices,  
And keep not my commandments;  
I will visit their iniquities with a rod,  
And their sins with stripes;  
But My mercy I will not take away from him,  
Nor will I suffer My truth to fail."

*Line 173.* Note emphatic position of "**Just.**"

Again, are we pressing words too far, if we note that it is "in My arms" and not "from" them that the lost treasures must be sought? Like a little child, after having strayed from her, nestles safely in its mother's arms, and finds its playthings all about it, so now the soul, without leaving God's embrace, will find all the former objects of its love brought near it.

*Line 174.* A pitiable commentary on a man is to say, "He is an overgrown child"; and yet every strayer from God is such. This likening man to a child and his waywardness to a child's wilfulness recalls Coventry Patmore's beautiful lines from "The Toys":

"Ah! when at last we lie with trancèd breath,  
Not vexing Thee in death,  
And Thou rememberest of what toys  
We made our joys,  
How weakly understood  
Thy great commanded good,  
Then, fatherly not less  
Than I whom Thou hast moulded from the clay,  
Thou'lt leave Thy wrath, and say,  
'I will be sorry for their childishness.'"

Before Patmore, the Royal Psalmist sang (Psalm cii, 12-14):

“As far as the east is from the west,  
 So far hath He removed our iniquities from us.  
 As a father hath compassion on his children,  
 So hath the Lord compassion on them that fear Him.  
 For He knoweth our frame;  
 He remembereth that we are dust.”

*Line 175. At Home.*—These words alone ought to win any soul to God; and they do, when fully grasped. With them God would reawaken the long slumbering echoes in the exile's soul and rouse anew that homesickness for heaven that every man feels in his heart. Truly, if that is home, “where our feet may leave, but not our hearts,” then the infinite homesickness of the human heart amid all the manifold joys of life, infallibly tells of a home beyond the grave. The realization of this makes us call our burying-ground, a “cemetery,” i. e., “sleeping-place” whence we are to awaken and arise. This knowledge makes every Christian cry out with St. Paul: “O death, where is thy victory? O death, where is thy sting?” (1 Corinthian xv, 55). To the pagans, of old and of to-day, who misread this yearning of the heart as a desire to stay and find at length full light where shadows always fall, death is a bitter, painful thing, that will snuff out even that mead of happiness we sometimes gain this side the grave. Dying is not to them what it was to the old Germans—*Heimgang*, a “going home.”

*Line 176.* Throughout these words there is no chiding, for this will come from the heart itself, when it has learned to love God more. “Thy own wickedness shall reprove thee, and thy apostasy shall rebuke thee. Know thou that it is an evil and a bitter thing for thee to have left the Lord thy God” (Jeremias ii, 19).

*Rise.*—Compare line 113, “And smitten me to my knee.” Hence the need of rising.

**Clasp My Hand.**—The eager welcome of the surrendering soul by Our Lord is beautifully pictured in these words. Compare Isaias xliii, 1: "And now thus saith the Lord that created thee, O Jacob, and formed thee, O Israel: Fear not, for I have redeemed thee, and called thee by thy name: thou art Mine."

*Lines 177-182*

With utter delicacy the poet describes the meeting in a few brief lines and draws the curtain, that words might not mar, with their vulgar noise, the sacredness of that recognition.

*Line 177.* The smooth rhythm of these lines audibly conveys the calm and peace of the surrendered soul.

*Line 178. Is My Gloom.*—The words of God have been working silently yet powerfully, and here a change of view-point is evidenced in the soul; and this, a change of view-point, is so markedly the beginning of repentance, that the early Greek theologians called the whole repentive process "a change of mind"—*μετάνοια* (=an after or later perception). Repentance is indeed a rectifying of a false judgment that a sinful act was worth the while committing. Because of this mental rectification and readjustment, there inevitably comes the resolve not to sin again.

*Line 179.* The soul begins to hear and understand the call of God: "Why seek you the living among the dead?" (St. Luke xxiv, 5). It has tried to find its heart's-ease there where it could not be found, feeding its immortal desires on passing trifles, which are, like the Dead Sea fruit, fair to behold but crumbling into ashes at the very touch.

With the thought of protecting shade we may compare Isaias xlix, 2: "And He hath made my mouth like a sharp sword: in the shadow of His hand He hath protected me, and hath made me a chosen arrow: in His quiver He hath hidden me." Indeed whatever darkness comes from God is one of

protection, for "God is light and in Him there is no darkness" (1 John i, 5).

Fr. Tabb (Eclipse) presents a similar idea:

"Fear not: the planet that bedims  
The moon's distorted face,  
Itself through cloudless ether swims  
The Sea of Space;

And earthward many a distant wing  
Of spirits in the light  
A salutary shade may fling  
To mark its flight."

*Line 180. Fondest.*—How strangely must this word fall on the erring soul! How has it been fond towards God? Yet it is by this word that God seems to eagerly second the slightest efforts of the soul. Truly the human soul is "fond." Its very capacity for love led its feet astray.

*Blindest.*—All wandering from God, all sin is indeed pitiable blindness. "Father forgive them for they know not what they do." Blind, indeed, is the soul since it cannot understand the prayer of an Augustine who had himself wandered far from God: "O Lord Thou hast made us for Thyself and our heart is restless till it rests in Thee" (Confessions Bk. I, ch. 1). Yes, and it has forgotten the hymn that awakened echoes in its child's heart:

"Thou alone canst fill it,  
Little though it be;  
For Thou, Lord, hast made it,  
All alone for Thee."

The soul must see that "destruction is thy own, O Israel; thy help is only in Me" (Osee xiii, 9). "I am, I am the Lord: and there is no saviour besides Me" (Isaias xlii, 11).



**Weakest.**—How eager is the Lover of souls to excuse! The “Little Flower” said that her heavenly Lover knew no mathematics, for He never adds our faults together once we are sorry for them. Here Our Lord shows Himself a true priest, “for every high priest, being selected from among men . . . is capable of bearing gently with the ignorant and the erring, since he is himself beset with weakness” (Hebrews v, 1-2).

*Line 182.* Even as the prodigal was welcomed by his expectant father, so the vagrant soul, that has wasted its substance on the fruitless love of creatures, is greeted by God its Father and brought back home, and all the Angels of God are glad for they know that their “brother was dead and is come to life again; he was lost and is found” (St. Luke xv, 32). Even as God bends down to greet the wayward culprit, it hears the cheering words: “Be of good comfort my children . . . for as it was your mind to go astray from God, so when you return again you shall seek Him ten times as much” (Baruch iv, 27-28). “Therefore at the least from this time call to Me: Thou art my Father” (Jeremias iii, 4).

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As the soul gives in at length to God and yields an unconditional surrender then “the peace of God which surpasseth all understanding” (Philippians iv, 7) enters into it and such joy comes, too, that the grateful soul breaks out into the song that Judith sang (Judith xvi, 16-17):

“O Adonai Lord, great art Thou,  
 And glorious in Thy power,  
 And no one can overcome Thee.  
 Let all Thy creatures serve Thee,  
 Because Thou hast spoken and they were made;  
 Thou didst send forth Thy spirit and they were created,  
 And there is no one that can resist Thy voice.”

No longer is it "sore adread, lest having Him, it must have naught beside" for it has learned that He and He alone, as "Goodness without limit," can satiate every craving of its being. Its one prayer now is the prayer of Loyola's soldier-saint: "Only Thy love and grace on me bestow, possessing these, all riches I forego." If there be aught of regret that it feels, it is that it has sadly squandered its love and surrendered too late and too reluctantly to God. "O Lord, our God, other lords besides Thee have had dominion over us, only in Thee let us remember Thy Name" (Isaias xxvi, 13). "Thou art great, O Lord, and Thy kingdom is unto all ages: for Thou scourgest, and Thou savest: Thou ledest down to hell and bringest up again, and there is none that can escape Thy hand" (Tobias xiii, 1-2).

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The pursuit is over now, but rest does not ensue. At once a new race is begun, but Our Lord is now at the side of the soul as it runs its course heavenwards. Nor is the race a slack one. "There is need of running, and of running vehemently. He that runneth a race, seeth none of those that meet him; whether he be passing through meadows, or through dry places: he that runneth, looketh not at the spectator, but at the prize. . . . He is occupied in one thing alone, in running, in gaining the prize. He that runneth never standeth still, since even if he slacken a little, he has lost the whole. He that runneth, not only slackens nothing before the end, but then even especially straineth his speed" (St. John Chrysostom, Homily vii, on the Epistle to the Hebrews). Yet there is the greatest joy and satisfaction in this race, for the soul now has caught the rich meaning of the words wherein St. Paul calls to us all, after that he has told of the faithful Saints of old: "And therefore we also having so great a cloud of witnesses over our heads, laying aside every weight and sin which surrounds us, let us

run with steadfastness the race proposed to us, looking on Jesus, the author and finisher of faith" (Hebrews xii, 1-2).

Thus side by side the soul and Our Lord will go forward in the race and there will be no anxiety "for though I should walk in the midst of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me. Thy rod and Thy staff, they comforted me" (Psalm xxii, 4). If we but journey on by His side and forsake Him not there will be no need of the prayer: "Cast me not off in the time of old age: when my strength shall fail, do not Thou forsake me" (Psalm lxx, 9); for we shall go on and on together through this valley of tears with the light of another world in our eyes and the music of Angels' song within our hearts. There will be days of gloom and trial, days when poor mortal flesh would fain take rest; but we shall travel swiftly on despite it all.

"Coward, wayward and weak,  
I change with the changing sky,  
One day eager and brave  
The next not caring to try,  
But He never gives in, and we two shall win,  
Jesus and I."

Thus will He lead us on, "o'er moor and fen, o'er crag and torrent, 'till the night is gone," "until the day dawn and the day-star arise" (2 Peter i, 19), and we come "home" to find our lost trinkets stored in Father's house. "O kingdom of eternal blessedness! where youth never groweth old, where beauty never waneth, nor love groweth cold, where health knows no sickness, where joy never decreaseth, where life hath no end" (St. Augustine, Soliloquy, ch. 36). "Even to your old age I am the same, and to your gray hairs I will carry you; I have made you and I will bear; I will carry and I will save" (Isaias xlii, 4). Therein lies the secret of it all, the comradeship of my changeless Friend.

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Le Buffe, F. P.

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